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Lectures on French Poets.

LECTURES ON FRENCH POETS.

DELIVERED AT THE ROYAL INSTITUTION

BY

WALTER HERRIES POLLOCK.

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XX-C-27

LONDON:
C. KEGAN PAUL & CO., 1 PATERNOSTER SQUARE.
1879.

92 8·41
Pol/Lec
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COLSTON AND SON, PRINTERS, EDINBURGH.

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TO

HENRY IRVING.

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PIERRE JEAN DE BÉRANGER.

PIERRE JEAN DE BÉRANGER.

OF all the poets whom modern France has produced, the influence of Pierre Jean de Béranger has been the most remarkable. Indeed, it would be difficult to find a parallel in any modern nation to the peculiar character of his power and its result. Not only so strange, but so great was this, that an English writer, whose knowledge of French literature is profound, Mr. Walter Besant, has said that Béranger is in some way the Shakespeare of France. The comparison is not altogether happy, for the conjunction of the two names

suggests incongruous images. Of dramatic force, we know from Béranger's own confession that he had nothing—overwhelming grandeur of thought and word he never attempted, knowing more accurately his own strength than is often the case with men of genius. Nor did his power lie in reading character of every grade and kind, and unfolding it with unerring command and skill. Yet, though we have little to show us that the works of Shakespeare enjoyed any extraordinary popularity in the poet's lifetime, that of Béranger was so considered, that what has been elsewhere said of him is undoubtedly true, that 'he is the one and only poet since the invention of printing who might have dispensed with the services of the press.'

More aptly than the Shakespeare, Béranger has been called the Burns of France. But that comparison also is defective. There is only one English writer who has had the same

kind of popular influence, who has caught so completely the ear and heart of the people as Béranger, and that writer was not a poet, but a novelist. There were, no doubt, external causes which helped the extraordinary effect of Béranger's songs; people's minds were confused and perturbed by the rapid shifting of political events; they were in a constant state of hoping, fearing, and waiting; and the man who had the courage and the skill to embody sentiments of a popular nature, but distasteful to the ruling power, in the words of witty and pretty songs, became naturally endeared to the people. Thus partly it was that, before ever they were printed, Béranger's songs passed from hand to hand and mouth to mouth, stirring up men's minds as swiftly and forcibly as the electric current which fires the torpedo that may explode an iron-clad.

Béranger, however, had begun to sing long before his utterances bore any meaning or pur-

pose beyond that of joyous impulse. He sang in his early youth, as the birds sing, and if the notes he gave forth were sometimes of a character somewhat less innocent than those of the birds, we may take his own assurance, that they had, by intention at least, no offence in them.

Upon this point, one on which, in dealing with Béranger at all, it is necessary to touch, but on which it is neither necessary nor desirable to dwell, one cannot do better than follow the course of a singularly appreciative writer in *Fraser's Magazine* for November 1849, who, replying to the unjust (except in a professional sense) attack made by de Marchangy in his character as advocate against Béranger in a court of law, says,—'There is nothing serious or sentimental in these songs, and they are all intended to excite merely laughter. "Un homme qui rit ne sera jamais dangéreux;"—nor will a song which makes a

man laugh be dangerous. When the effect is harmless, so is the cause.'

Perhaps the statement that there is more harm in a page of 'La Nouvelle Héloise' than in all the loose songs that Béranger ever wrote, or that were ever fathered on him, is somewhat extravagant; but there is a sound foundation of truth in it.

Having touched on this point, we may pass to the story of Béranger's life—a story which is doubtless well known, but which has so much interest, that little apology seems needed for recurring to it. And if we wish to go at once to the matters upon which the whole tenor of Béranger's life depended, and to get a general impression of the man and his nature before going into any of the details of his life, his own words in the preface to his songs can instruct us.

'I have never,' he wrote, 'pretended to any higher title than that of a song-writer, know-

ing well that the prouder I was in keeping this title, to which I owe so much, the more right I should have to be leniently judged as one who was out of the pale of comparison with the brightest lights of my age. The necessity of holding this particular ground has always kept me from seeking the most envied and desirable literary honours, in spite of the entreaties of my friends, who, I blush to say it, promised me in such a pursuit more good fortune than belonged to Benjamin Constant, who was great alike as politician, orator, and writer. Poor Constant! To those who doubt my sincerity in this, here is my reply:—My youth was cradled among the loftiest of poetic dreams: there is scarcely one of the highest lines of the art that I have not secretly tried. Thinking to be the hero of a vast career at twenty years old, I, destitute of learning, even to the point of ignorance of Latin, sought to inspire myself with the deepest secrets of our

language and its style. The most generous encouragement was given to me. Can you, I ask, imagine that I have forgotten all this; and that now, looking back with deep sadness on the little I have done, I am inclined to exaggerate its value? But I have made my poet's life useful, and in that lies my comfort. A man was wanted to speak to the people a language it knows and loves, to raise up followers who should preach on the same text after him. That man I have been. It is easy to say, "Liberty and Patriotism could have done very well without the refrain of your songs." But Liberty and Patriotism are not such fine ladies as you perhaps think. Let anything be popular, and they will not scorn its help. It would be unfair, I think, to judge my songs without taking into account the influences they have had. There are times in a nation's history when the best music it can hear is the drum's summons to the charge.

After all, if it is thought that I attach too much importance to my rhymes, surely a veteran on the eve of retirement may be forgiven for swelling a little his terms of service. It may be noted that I say scarce a word of my wounds, and, besides, the reward I beg will not add a penny to the expenses of the budget. As a song-writer, I must answer an oft-repeated criticism. I have been accused of changing the nature of songs, in giving them a higher tone than they took from the Collés, the Panards, and the Désaugiers. It would ill become me to deny this, for to it I attribute my success. In the first place, however, I may point out that the song, like many other styles of writing, is in itself a language, and can, like other languages, take divers tones. I may add that, since 1789, the people, having taken its share in the affairs of the nations, has developed more and more its opinions and patriotic ideas, as our history

proves. Since that time, then, it has behoved songs, which have been defined as the expression of popular sentiments, to raise themselves to the level of the feelings of joy or sorrow which triumph or defeat produce on the multitude. Love and wine could no longer furnish more than the mere framework of the ideas possessing a people that had risen from the Revolution. No longer could one win the honour of being sung by artisans and soldiers at tavern tables with tales of tricked husbands, greedy lawyers, and Charon's bark. Nor was this honour any longer enough. This new form of the expression of popular notions had yet to make its way into drawing-rooms, and to carry thither the triumph of these notions. Hence a need for greater finish in the character and form of song.'

Later on the writer descants eloquently upon the claims of the people to be considered by those who produce works of art.

'I have sometimes thought,' he says, 'that if contemporary writers had reflected that henceforth it is for the people that letters must be cultivated, they would not have envied me the little palm which their neglect has enabled me to gather, and which, I doubt not, would have held its own among even more glorious rivalry. When I say the people, I mean the mob—I mean even the lowest grade of the populace. This kind you will say cannot appreciate fine wit and delicate taste, and you are right; but for that very reason, an author's conception, to catch its hearing, must be the stronger and grander. Therefore, adapt your subject and its treatment to the needs of the people's strong nature; they want neither abstract ideas nor conventional types; bare the human heart for them. It was, it seems to me, by following these conditions that Shakespeare was specially fortunate. Then what, say you, becomes of perfection of style? Think you that if Racine's

inimitable power of verse had been applied to a high class of melodrama, a boulevard audience would have been kept from listening to it because of its perfect expression?'

Here one may pause for a moment to consider the justice of what Béranger has said. The objections which he puts into his supposed interlocutor's mouth seem to have a force which he does not completely combat. It is true that the uneducated cannot appreciate the finer shades of wit and beauty in poetry; it is also true that stirring poetry, stirring that is in the direction of good, which the least cultivated can understand, is a very desirable thing. But if we accept Béranger's argument in its fulness, a thing which perhaps he himself did not intend, we should have to banish all the finer shades of feeling and expression developed by progress to make way for the broad and simple effects which, to use his own figure, a boulevard audience can at once appreciate.

Or, to put the matter in another form, our poets would have to write for children instead of for grown men. For to suppose that people who went to see a melodrama would relish it as much clothed in exquisitely polished verse as in straightforward prose, is extravagant. The elaborate tropes and figures—more than that, the lofty thoughts and aspirations which Racine embodied in his verse—would be out of place in the exhibition of the rapid and startling events upon which a boulevard melodrama depends. The essence of such an exhibition is action, and by the need of poetical expression, as Racine understood it, action of the melodramatic kind is retarded. The discipline of the school in which Racine studied and wrote demands this. Where the modern dramatist would show on the stage the terrible catastrophe which has been led up to by the conflict of passion and event he has presented, Racine, true to the classical model, causes the climax

of the tragedy to be not exhibited but related to the spectator by a supposed eye-witness. And the descriptive grandeur and fire put into the mouth of this witness can scarcely atone for the impatience caused by the long deliberation with which he details every circumstance of an event for which his hearers are prepared almost before he comes on the stage.

What Béranger imagined—the combination of the grandest poetry with a revelation of human life that appeals to the rudest minds, had no doubt been accomplished, as he suggests, by Shakespeare, and was accomplished by a later French poet. But in both cases it was accomplished by a method very different from that of Racine. To make a great work of poetic art popular in Béranger's sense—that is, to preserve the full grandeur of the subject, and by its treatment make it stir the hearts of the people—was a feat which he himself performed

in his songs, and which, in the more intricate forms of French poetry, was reserved for the romantic school to accomplish.

Béranger, in the remarks which have just been discussed, seems to have been betrayed into applying his knowledge of his own form of art in which he had attained perfection to other forms to which his genius had no bent. The complete simplicity which he imparted—with infinite pains, it should be remembered—to his songs could hardly belong to the more involved expressions of feeling to which he wished to apply it, or rather, to put it briefly, the frankness of direct narration could never be combined with the evolution of character and incident that the dramatist has to deal with.

The poet—or to give him the title he chooses for himself—the song-writer goes on to speak eloquently of the people. 'Look,' he says, 'at our painters! Do they ever repre-

sent men of the people without making them repulsive? And could not this very people retort on them—"Is it my fault if I am ragged? if my face is wan with want, or even with degradation? These wrecked and faded features have shone with the glory of daring and liberty: beneath these rags courses the blood that I shed at my country's call. It is when my soul is roused you should paint me; then am I splendid.'

It is little wonder that the people loved the man who wrote of them thus, and the wonder is less when one turns to almost the next paragraph, which celebrates the idol of that people, whom Béranger himself idolised with an enthusiasm that some have found it difficult to reconcile with his avowed principles.

'The greatest poet of modern times,' he writes, 'perhaps the greatest poet of all times, Napoleon, when he had shaken off the imitation of the monarchic forms, judged the people

as our poets and artists ought to judge them. For instance, he made it a rule that all gratis dramatic representations should be composed of the best works of the French drama. Molière and Corneille were constantly represented, and it was remarked that their works were never more judiciously applauded. This great man had early learnt in his campaigns and in the thick of revolutionary trouble how high the instinct of the masses properly managed can reach. . . . Let our authors, then, set to work seriously for these masses, who are so well prepared to receive the instruction they need.'

Béranger wrote this appeal to younger poets at a time when the idea that poetry could be guided by anything but the old set and formal rules was comparatively new to the French mind; and if what he says is exaggerated it must be remembered that much insistence is needed to overturn traditions.

But making allowance for this, there is much that seems worth attention in his remarks. Even now, and here in England, some poets and artists might take a lesson from the French song-writer, and try to appeal more directly to the masses without sacrificing any fineness or keenness of expression. This should surely not be an impossible task—and by giving good tidings of high thoughts and deeds to the people, the poet or painter may at once educate his public and gain its lasting gratitude. Such an influence as Béranger had is, one would think, a better reward than the mystic appreciation of a small band of followers, impelled as much by vanity as anything else to discover, or affect to discover, in their leader's very faults and obscurities, hidden beauties which, according to them, the run of mankind is too stupid or too 'uncultured' to perceive.

To return, however, from the many reflections which Béranger's writing suggests to

Béranger himself. A saying of his, quoted some little way back, may be remembered. 'I have made my poet's life useful; a man was wanted to speak to the people a tongue it knows and loves. That man I have been. In this assertion there was no exaggeration; and this fact appears perhaps more remarkable when one considers the circumstances from which Béranger rose to fulfil this destiny. He was born on the 19th August 1780, in the house of his grandfather, Champy, a tailor, in the street of Montorgueil, in Paris, of which he himself says,—'Who would have thought that I, born in one of the dirtiest and noisiest streets of Paris, should have such a love for woods and fields, flowers and birds?'

His father, who had been by turns a notary's clerk and a grocer's bookkeeper, had left his mother six months after their marriage, and the boy was brought up for some nine years by his grand-parents, both of whom had more

or less literary tastes. From there he went into the care of an aunt, who kept a little inn in the suburbs of Péronne. This aunt was an enthusiastic Republican, but not the less an excellent woman; and she seems to have displayed a singular good sense in the management of such education as she could give to her nephew. He gives an anecdote of one of her methods of instruction, which made a lively impression upon the future singer of the people.

At the time of the Reign of Terror, some friends of hers, living in a neighbouring village, were arrested and brought to prison at Péronne in the middle of the night. In the morning she took the boy into the town to visit them, and when she came to the prison wicket, said to him,—'My boy, we are going to see some worthy people and excellent citizens who have been deprived of their liberty by a slanderous accusation. I have

brought you here to teach you what persecutions well-conducted people may be exposed to in troubled times.'

The lesson thus early learnt of what the Republic did may possibly have had its effect in teaching Béranger later to reconcile his love for the people and their liberty with his adoration of the Emperor, who, though he was an Emperor, was beloved by the people, and looked up to by them as a protecting deity.

In 1795, Béranger's father came to Péronne, and as he was an ardent Royalist, and the aunt was an ardent Republican, the discussions which took place between them were frequent and amusing. At this time many of the Royalist party were possessed with a curious belief, of which the poet gives an account. They imagined that Napoleon would be content to play the king-maker to a certain M. de Vernon, living in Brittany, who was none other than the rightful heir to the French

throne. This M. de Vernon was, according to them, the son of the 'Man in the Iron Mask,' who, on the same authority, was the son of Louis XIII. and his Queen, who, under pressure from Richelieu, had concealed the child's existence. Béranger afterwards made inquiries concerning this extraordinary tale, which was recounted to him by a certain M. de la Carterie. He found that M. de Vernon did, in fact, live in Brittany, supported by his credulous adherents, and was supposed under the Empire to be the object of strict watch on the part of the police.

Another story of a different kind told by Béranger at this period of his biography—the story of 'La Mère Jary'—is valuable as affording a proof that he could give to prose writing the same charm of simplicity and seeming ease that he imparted to his songs.

At this period Béranger's father, by bold financial enterprises, made a fortune, which

disappeared in 1798, and in the early days of the Consulate we find him living in the garret, which he has sung with such pathetic gaiety, and making verses in his light-hearted poverty. He was happy, he says, in his escape from a business which had never pleased him; and for every social meeting at which he and his friends made up for narrow means by elastic spirits he had a song ready. However, the most light-hearted of poets cannot live upon gaiety alone, and, in 1804, Béranger resolved suddenly to write to Lucien Bonaparte and ask him for assistance. 'My gold watch,' says Béranger, 'and many other relics of our brief wealth, had gone to the pawnbroker's; my wardrobe was in a deplorable state, and my boots drove me to despair, because every morning as I cleaned them I found a new hole.' Suddenly a letter was brought, which he tremblingly opened, and found to be from Lucien Bonaparte, who had read his verses

and wished to see him. He hastily borrowed some presentable clothes and went. 'When I think,' he says, 'of the two weak dithyrambic poems which I dared to send to that illustrious man, himself an orator and a poet, I am astonished at the kindness he showed me. He assured me of his wish to help me on, and as a proof of it sent me soon afterwards from Rome an order to receive his salary as Member of the Institute.' Béranger, in deference to the wishes of his patron, set himself to work at a classical poem, 'The Death of Nero;' but in this, he says, as one might expect, he found himself out of his element.

Foreseeing that his present position was an unstable one, and dreading to be forced into making literature his sole means of subsistence, he applied to Arnault, the tragic poet, a friend of Lucien Bonaparte's, and head of the office of Public Education. Arnault wished him to become a journalist; but he says,—'I never felt

any inclination for this kind of work, which has engulfed so many young men of talent, born perhaps for a brilliant career, and which, moreover, terrified me with my lazy pen and timorous conscience. To take up such a profession I should have had to abandon my bright poetical dreams; it would have made my garret lonely indeed.' The same thing seems to have happened to him again at a later date. 'In 1816,' writes Sainte-Beuve in one of his Nouveaux Lundis on Béranger's correspondence, 'he escaped a danger fatal to a poet, that of becoming a critic or journalist.' M. Etienne, it appears, wished to instal him in the place of the writer who succeeded Geoffroy as theatrical critic on the *Débats*, but Béranger declined, on the same ground of timorous conscience which he describes in his Biography.

Whether journalism is in truth so deadly to high literary aims as Sainte-Beuve and Béranger assert, may perhaps be doubted; but it is toler-

ably certain that Béranger was right in thinking that it could never suit him as a vocation. Arnault, some three years after Béranger's first introduction to him, found him a small place in the office of the Imperial University. He now lived in a house near the Barrière Rochechouart, whence in 1814 he saw the approach of the great Emperor's enemies upon Paris. A squadron of hussars took possession of the butte Montmartre—the noise of firing ceased, and Béranger, rushing out to see what had happened, learnt that the aides-de-camp of the Duc de Raguse had signed a capitulation.

The working classes, true to their faith in their idol, waited anxiously for the Emperor to arrive, and when they learnt the fatal news, a kind of stupefied rage ran through the mob. When the Allies entered, some thousand or twelve hundred Bourbonists received them with delight and enthusiasm. 'Ainsi un lâche troupeau de Français foulait aux pieds

les trophées de nos vingt cinq dernières années de gloire devant des étrangers qui par leur tenue prouvaient si bien qu'ils en gardaient un profond souvenir.'

The Bourbonist party, it seems, had judged from Béranger's song, the 'Roi d'Yvetot,' which was supposed on very slender grounds to be a satire on the Emperor, that the poet might be enlisted on their side; but in this they were much deceived. The first published volume of Béranger's songs, which appeared in 1815, was quite enough to show that his sympathies were not with the Bourbons. It passed off, however, without any official reprimand. 'Il faut pardonner bien de choses à l'auteur du "Roi d'Yvetot,"' the King is reported to have said. The publication had, however, the effect of establishing Béranger as the popular song-writer of the Opposition; and, in 1821, he published by subscription two volumes of old and new songs. This, he had been warned beforehand, would

lose him his place in the University; and the Government, who most probably would rather have left the matter alone, felt compelled to take notice of a publication which had assumed so much of a party character. The song-maker was therefore put upon his trial, and the prosecution was conducted by M. de Marchangy, the Attorney-General. He seems to have been conscious that he had a tolerably weak case, for he opened it by trying to persuade the jury that Béranger's songs were not to be considered in the light of songs at all.

'Song, gentlemen,' he said, 'has a kind of privilege in France; even its licence is readily excused. The spirit of our country protects it, and gaiety ensures an acquittal. Such is, or rather such was the real character of songs in France; but since the Revolution this spoilt child of the Muses has abandoned itself to wilder excesses. Sarcastic impiety has taken the place of national gaiety—provocations to

murder have succeeded to jokes and raillery. Excesses of every kind have been stimulated by these hitherto innocent incentives, and the popular muse has become one of the direst furies of our civil discords.'

The trial, not unnaturally, excited immense interest. So great was the pressure that the judge had to get into the court-room by the windows, and Béranger himself had the greatest difficulty in penetrating the crowd. In the course of the proceedings, Marchangy did his utmost to ensure a heavy penalty being inflicted on the defendant, and was sometimes led by his eagerness into ludicrous extravagances, as when speaking of 'Le Bon Dieu,' one of the songs that was considered impious, he indignantly demanded, 'Was it thus that Plato spoke of the Deity?'

There were not wanting, however, people who took the French Attorney-General's view of the matter, which, ten years after the

trial, was warmly supported by the *Quarterly Review.* It may not be not altogether uninteresting to refer to this expression of opinion as an instance of how things have changed since 1831. One of the songs, as has just been said, selected for special reprehension by the Government was 'Le Bon Dieu,' which is a song of some half-dozen stanzas charged full of the *esprit Gaulois*—a biting satire clothed in playful language. What Marchangy said of this in his speech for the prosecution has been quoted. What the *Quarterly Review* said, in language of which the confusion was perhaps due to emotion, was this:—'Another instance is more serious. In a song, of which the title "Le Bon Dieu" is itself very offensive, while the production itself is execrably irreverent, the Deity is supposed to review the proceedings of kings and governments in this world, and the burden of each of these batches of blasphemy is—

"Si c'est par moi qu'ils régnent de la sorte
Je veux bien que le diable m'emporté."'

'This,' says the indignant reviewer, 'may be gaiety and good taste in France; but to us it seems mere stupid vulgarity.'

The President of the Court seems to have been well disposed to Béranger; for, in his summing up, he said it was unfortunate that the dignity of a court of justice prevented the obnoxious songs being sung to the jury, as singing might make them seem less harmful. However, the song-writer was sentenced to a fine of 500 francs and three months' imprisonment, which he passed gaily enough in St. Pélagie.

During his imprisonment reports of the trial were published, and in these reports was contained every word of the condemned songs, which had all been read in court. This ingenious publication gave grounds for a fresh prosecution, which completely broke down, so

that the Government did not get very much by their move.

In 1825 he published another volume, and in 1828 yet another, which again drew down a prosecution upon the author. Before its appearance, the Minister Martignac had effected a kind of fusion between the Centre and the Left; and Béranger was begged not to publish his volume, lest it might disturb this arrangement. 'But,' he writes, 'the more people preached silence to me, the more I felt bound to break it, and enter a protest against a fusion, as they called it, which blinded public opinion and seemed likely to strengthen the Legitimists.'

The volume was accordingly published, and created a great sensation. Béranger was again prosecuted and convicted, and sentenced this time to a fine of 10,000 francs and nine months' imprisonment. These he passed very contentedly at La Force, where he was visited

by Victor Hugo, Alexandre Dumas, Sainte-Beuve, and others.

Two years later came the change of Government for which the poet had worked so much, and then Béranger felt that his part was done. His friends pressed him to take office, and the Government offered him a pension; but he refused either to assume an active part in public affairs or to accept any of the public money.

In 1833 he published another volume of songs, and in 1840 he wrote his Biography.

It has been said that people have found it difficult to reconcile his devotion to the Emperor with his political opinions, and this may be a convenient occasion for referring to what he himself says on this point.

'My constant and enthusiastic admiration for the genius of the Emperor, the idolatry he inspired in the people, who always saw in him the representative of victorious equality—this

admiration and idolatry which made of Napoleon the noblest object of my songs—never blinded me as to the ever-increasing despotism of the Empire. In 1814, I only saw in the fall of the Colossus the unhappiness of a country which the Republic had taught me to adore. On the return of the Bourbons, for whom I cared little, I thought that their weakness would make the new birth of national liberties an easy thing. We were assured that they were friends to these liberties in spite of the Charter. I believed little in this; but these liberties could be imposed upon them. As to the people, from whom I never separated myself after the fatal end of such long wars, their opinion did not seem to me at first to be adverse to the masters who had just been disinterred for them. I sang then the glory of France; I sang it in presence of strangers without yet being hostile to the restored Royalty.

'I have been reproached for making a bitter

opposition to the Bourbons; what I have just said is an answer to such a charge. But our illusions lasted a short time only; a few months were enough to let us see where we were, and to open the eyes even of the least clear-sighted.

In 1848 Béranger was, against his will, elected to represent the Department of the Seine by more than 200,000 votes. He took his seat after vain protests, but kept it only for two or three days, after which he begged to be allowed to resign. From that time until his death, in 1857, he lived in retirement—a retirement which was once rudely pried into. This was when Béranger and Judith Frère, the friend whose affection and devotion had never failed him since his early garret days, set up house together. She was fifty-seven, and he was fifty-five. One would have thought that Béranger might have been safe from insult; but a French newspaper reporter has little respect for age, or anything else; and a story

appeared in one of the papers, to the effect that the poet had just married his servant. This he contradicted, in a letter which ended thus:—'Despite my love of retirement, a wish to oblige others has led me to admit too many visitors. I see that until delicacy and good taste prevent people from scaling the walls which are supposed to surround private life, we must shut our doors. Meanwhile, I shall put a bolt on mine, and shall owe an increase of quiet to your witty reporter. I beg you, therefore, to thank him from me; and to believe me, your very humble servant, BÉRANGER.'

In Béranger's will he expressed a wish that his funeral should be private; but it was impossible to prevent the people of Paris from assembling to do honour to his memory as the funeral procession walked along the streets. Balconies, roofs, and boats on one of the canals were crowded with people, who cried enthusiastically, 'Honneur, honneur à Béranger.' This

was indeed no more than a fitting tribute to a poet and a patriot who had fulfilled in his life the ambition proclaimed by Napoleon, to be 'tout par le peuple et pour le peuple.' How consistently adherent to a high principle was his public life has been seen. In private life he was one of the most lovable and charitable of men, constantly helping others, and giving to them out of his own poverty. One story may serve to illustrate this side of his character. In 1826, Rouget de Lisle, the writer of the 'Marseillaise,' was thrown into prison for debt. France was less grateful to him than she showed herself afterwards to Béranger; and it was Béranger who sought him out, offered him help with infinite delicacy and tact, saved him from starvation and suicide, and finally procured him a pension.

The general character of Béranger's poetry could hardly be better described than it has been by himself in the song of 'La Bonne Vieille,' of

which Judith Frère was the heroine, and in which he said of himself:—'D'un luth joyeux il attendrit les sons.' It is this mixture of gaiety and tenderness which gives a charm to many of the poet's songs; and it is well exhibited in 'Le Grenier,' of which Thackeray has written a charming version, called 'The Garret.' He was capable, however, of putting aside the 'esprit Gaulois' and striking notes of deep and unmixed tenderness, as is shown in 'Les Etoiles qui Filent' (of which Mr. Walter Besant has published in his 'French Humourists' a version which reproduces with singular skill and appreciation the meaning of the original), and in 'La Fille du Diable.' But it is in his songs devoted to glorifying the great Napoleon that Béranger catches most the popular sentiment. One of these, 'Il n'est pas mort,' celebrates one of the strangest and most striking superstitious legends which clung around the great Emperor. It is the expression of

an old soldier's belief, in which the villagers to whom he speaks cordially agree, that the Emperor cannot be dead, in spite of his death having been reported for eight years. 'We know well enough,' says the speaker, 'that he was carried off secretly at night in a ship by sailors devoted to him—and that even now he is wandering unknown through France waiting his time :—

'Déguisé, seul, il erre, poursuivi.
Ce cavalier de chétive apparence,
De la forêt ce braconnier qui sort,
C'est lui peut-être. Il vient sauver la France!
N'est il pas vrai mon Dieu qu'il n'est pas mort?'

Béranger, in a note to this song, says that while he writes the legend is yet alive, and it will be remembered that so late as the time of the *plèbiscite* in the second French Empire, it was said that many of the French peasants believed they were voting for the first Napoleon. Other superstitions grew about this extra-

ordinary man. And there is one to which we have a parallel in our Queen's weather, that the sun shone for him whenever he showed himself on any great occasion. All these Béranger has embodied in one of the very finest of his songs, 'Les Souvenirs du Peuple.'

Those who wish to make or renew a close acquaintance with Béranger's work, cannot do better than to begin with this song. It is tolerably sure to tempt them on to others.

ALFRED DE MUSSET.

ALFRED DE MUSSET.

THERE is a pretty and fantastic legend of Théophile Gautier's called 'Le Chevalier Double.' Its scene is laid in Norway long ago; and its hero is Oluf, son of the Count and Countess Lodbrog. Before his birth there came to the count's castle a master singer from Bohemia. He is described as being as handsome as an angel, but a fallen angel. His smile and his look were sweet, and yet they froze you with terror, and gave you the same feeling of alarm that comes from bending over an abyss. All his movements had a wicked grace, a treacherous languor, like that of the tiger watching his prey; he had the fascination of the serpent for the bird. He sang

strange songs which troubled the heart and mind, and while he sang a black raven sat on his shoulder, beating time with its beak and applauding with its wings. He went away, but he left a strange impression on the Countess Lodbrog's mind—and this impression had its effect upon her son. When he was born his nativity was cast; and the astrologer came down from his tower saying, 'Count Oluf has two stars—one green, one red—the green is for hope, the red for destruction. A double influence is upon him; he will be either very happy or very unhappy; I know not which. Perhaps both together.'

Young Oluf was a strange child; he seemed to be composed of two children of different natures; on one day he displayed angelic goodness; on another the malice of a fiend; at one moment he laughed, the next he wept. He was capricious as the moon, seemed to have no motive for his actions, started under-

takings quickly, and as quickly abandoned them. He passed at one bound from the most violent excitement to the most impassive calm. When he was alone he seemed to have with him an invisible companion. If he was asked the reason of his startling ways, he said that the red star was tormenting him. As he grew up the same curious duality remained in him. He loved, and was loved by, many women, but his love never brought happiness with it. The fatal inequality of his character prevented it. One half of him only was inspired with passion; the other was filled with hatred. Now it was the turn of the green, and now of the red star.

'Un jour il vous dit, "O blanches vierges du Nord, étincelantes et pures comme les glaces du pôle; prunelles de clair de lune; joues nuancées des fraicheurs de l'aurore boréale!" Et l'autre jour il s'écriait, 'O filles

d'Italie, dorées par le soleil et blondes comme l'orange! cœurs de flamme dans des poitrines de bronze." Ce qu'il y a de plus triste, c'est qu'il est sincère dans les deux exclamations.'

'Do not reproach him,' says the writer, 'you whom he has made unhappy, for you should know that he is far more wretched than you; his heart is a field of combat, trampled ceaselessly by two unknown wrestlers, who struggle as did Jacob and the angel.'

One day Oluf set out on horseback through the snow that covered the woods, accompanied by his two great dogs, to ride to the castle, where dwelt Brenda. The day before she had spoken to him with dislike of the companion who always rode with him.

'What companion do you mean?' he asked.

'The red knight,' she replied, 'who is always with you, the fatal familiar who possesses you. Cast him aside, or never speak to me of love again; I cannot be the wife of two husbands.'

Oluf went away perplexed, in ill humour, and resolved to attack the red knight whenever he could see him. As he rode through the snow-wrapt forest next day, a troop of ravens suddenly whirled round the plume of his helmet; his dogs stopped short, the noise of steps was heard, and from a turn of the path came a knight mounted on a tall horse, and followed by two great dogs. He was armed at all points exactly like Oluf, except that he wore a red instead of a green plume. The road was so narrow that one of the knights must give place to the other, and accordingly a combat, in which dogs and horses joined, began. Oluf felt every blow given to his unknown enemy himself, and when at last the stranger knight was beaten down, and his visor fell off, Oluf saw an exact likeness of his own face. He had fought and conquered the red knight. From that moment his troubles were at an end, and Brenda became his bride.

The leading idea of this story has been used by various imaginative writers, among others, by Hawthorne in one of his tales, by Edgar Poe in his 'William Wilson,' and by Mr. George Macdonald in his 'Phantastes.' Théophile Gautier's story has that charm of diction of which he had the secret; but perhaps the most curious point about it is that with the exception of the ending the description of Oluf applies almost exactly to the character and life of Alfred de Musset. In him, as in Oluf, there were always two natures at work in opposition to each other. The one was tender, gentle, quick to feel every impression of outside circumstances, to respond to kindness with all the warmth of a poet's heart, and to grieve at harshness, ingratitude, or malice with the sorrow of a child who cannot believe that the world is not all beautiful. The other was hard, suspicious, distrusting alike the people and the impressions he encountered, treating

life as a thing to be made tolerable only by a reckless abandonment of all belief in, or strivings after, high aims—a spectacle for the due enjoyment of which were needed a mind resolved against any serious enterprise—a wit ready to jest at scars, and a heart prepared to deny the possibility of feeling a wound. Such, more or less, were the two natures always working against each other in Musset, of whom it might be said, that he was constantly playing Mephistopheles to his own Faust. Had he possessed more of the 'spirit that denies,' he might have been a far more contented, though perhaps not a happier, man. Had he had less of it he might have found happiness, as did Gautier's *Chevalier Double*, in gaining the victory for his better over his worser self. Or again, it might have gone better with him if his character had been still more complex, if it had possessed yet another element to dominate and reduce to order the

existing conflict. If, like Goethe, he could have held in check the impulsive sensitiveness which is part of the poet's nature; if he could have felt, and, at the same time resisted, the myriad emotions which he allowed to take absolute possession of him, his life would have been certainly happier, and his work probably grander. But this it was his fate or his weakness to be unequal to. His one self was constantly at war with his other, and neither ever gained a decisive victory. He was afflicted, as he tells us in his 'Confessions d'un Enfant du Siècle,' with the sickness of the time in which he lived.

'Pendant les guerres de l'Empire,' he writes in this work, 'tandis que les maris et les frères étaient en Allemagne, les mères inquiétes avaient mis au monde une génération ardente, pâle, nerveuse. Conçus entre deux batailles, élevès dans les colléges au roulement des tambours, des milliers d'enfants se regardaient entre eux d'un œil sombre, en essayant leurs muscles

chétifs. De temps en temps leurs pères ensanglantés apparaissaient, les soulevaient sur leurs poitrines chamarrées d'or, puis les posaient à terre et remontaient à cheval. . . . Un seul homme était en vie alors en Europe; le reste des êtres tâchait de se remplir les poumons de l'air qu'il avait respiré. Chaque année la France faisait présent à cet homme de trois cent mille jeunes gens; c'était l'impôt payé à César et s'il n'avait ce troupeau derrière lui il ne pouvait suivre sa fortune. C'était l'escorte qu'il luit fallait pour qu'il pût traverser le monde, et s'en aller tomber dans une île déserte sous un saule pleureur.'

Musset goes on to describe how while there had never been so many sleepless nights, so many wretched mothers, as in the time of this Emperor, yet there had also never been so much gaiety, so much busy and careless life. Never had there been such bright suns as shone to dry up the blood that was shed. 'They said,'

he writes, 'that God produced them on purpose for this man, and they were called his Austerlitz suns. But it was he who produced them with his ever-thundering cannons, that left no clouds but on the morrows of his battles. It was the air of this stainless heaven, brilliant with martial glory, and splendid with swords, that the children of that time breathed. They knew well that they were destined for hecatombs; but they believed Murat to be invulnerable, and they had seen the Emperor cross a bridge amid the hurtling of so many bullets that they doubted if he could ever die. And if to them death should come, what mattered it? Death itself was then so full of grandeur and of pride, it was so like to hope, it had mowed down so many green ears, that it took on itself an aspect of youth, and the belief in old age was dead. Every cradle in France was a buckler, and so was every coffin. There were no more old men left—there was nothing but

corpses and demi-gods.' When the Emperor fell, he goes on to say, 'Alors il s'assit sur un monde en ruine une jeunesse soucieuse.'

To this *jeunesse soucieuse*, to this *génération ardente, pâle, nerveuse*, Musset emphatically belonged; and he is describing the condition not only of himself, but of many others who, having a less sensitive nature, suffered from that condition less than himself, when he tells of the effect caused by the sudden fall of the man who had seemed immortal, and with whom fell for a time the whole youth of France. To this youth, says Alfred de Musset, came presently the poetry of Goethe and of Byron, and what the French poet says of these is strangely characteristic.

'Forgive me,' he cries, 'great poets; you are demi-gods, and I am nothing but a sick child. But while I recall this, I cannot but detest you. Why did you not sing of the scent of flowers and the voices of nature, of love and

hope, of the sun-fed vine, of the blue of the sky and the loveliness of the earth?' Or in other words, 'Why did you show how much stronger you were than us? Why did you insist on facing the realities of life? Why, not content with knowing it yourselves, did you try to teach us that the world was no bed of roses, and that for those who can feel and think it is full of troubles which must be met? Why could you not rock us to sleep with tales of love and glory, instead of opening our eyes to the possibilities of suffering and shame?

This is the cry which through many thoughts and words of beauty and depths of passion one may hear, if one will, in all Alfred de Musset's sustained efforts, whether in verse or prose,—Why is the world so full of ugly and evil things? Or why, at least, was I born to be afflicted with them?—And it was no doubt to escape this sense of affliction which he could not face and overcome, that the poet

allowed his mocking and bitter self to run away with him and carry him into extravagances and weaknesses which his higher nature hated and despised.

A little later on, in the 'Confession d'un Enfant du Siècle,' Musset describes the effect produced on the youth of France by the spread of Goethe's and Byron's poetry among them. They formed themselves, he says, into two camps. On one side were ranged the natures which were full of exaltation and of suffering; all the souls that longed for the breath of the infinite bent their heads and wept; they wrapped themselves in sickly dreams, and became as frail reeds floating on a sea of bitterness. On the other side were the men of matter, impassive amid their material joys, far from any care but that of counting their money. On the one side was a sob, on the other a burst of laughter; the one came from the body the other from the soul. This is what the soul

said,—'Ah me! Religion has left us—the clouds fall in rain. We have left neither hope nor expectation, nor even two bits of black wood of which to make a cross, and stretch to it our hands. The star of the future can scarcely rise; it cannot leave the horizon; it lies there wrapped in clouds, and, like the winter sun, its disk is yet red with the blood of '93. Love and glory are dead. A thick night enwraps the earth, and when the day comes we shall be no more.'

And this is what the body said,—'Man is placed in the world to make use of his senses; he has a larger or smaller number of yellow or white pieces which gain him more or less consideration. To eat, to drink, and to sleep, this it is to live. As for the bonds hat unite men together, friendship consists in lending money, but one rarely loves a friend enough to do that for him. Relationship is good if your relations leave you anything;

love is a mere material thing, and the only intellectual delight is vanity.'

It was Musset's condition to belong to both of these camps; to side now with the one, and now with the other; and when in others of his works he brings together *Rodolphe* and *Albert* in his 'Idylle,' or *Célio* and *Octave* in 'Les Caprices de Marianne,' he is recording his own inner history.

Alfred de Musset's work was the result of this troubled and contradictory time which he describes; but from that very trouble much of its beauty was drawn. It has been said that he was wanting in self-command, and that is a conclusion at which anyone who reads his life must needs arive. He could not himself stand against the current that swept him away, but he could tell the world of his struggles in terms moving enough to convey to others the warning he himself could not take. Every experience that he passed through was the

germ of a work of marvellously conceived and executed art; and the weakness which was destructive to him became a possible source of strength to others.

Alfred de Musset, the son of an old and noble race, was born on the 11th December 1810, in a street near the Hotel Cluny, which has since almost disappeared in the improvement of Paris. His brother, M. Paul de Musset, has preserved certain anecdotes of his childhood, one of which is interesting, as illustrating the impulsiveness and absorption in whatever caught his fancy for the moment which belonged to the poet throughout his life. At three years old he was presented with a pair of little red shoes which he infinitely admired. In these he was to go out, but before this delight could be attained it was necessary that his hair should be combed. While his mother was combing it he grew impatient, and said in a tearful voice,

—'Make haste, mamma, make haste, or my new shoes will grow old.' Another incident of his childhood has been preserved, and is perhaps worth repeating. In one of the rooms in the old house where the Musset family dwelt, there was a great beam running across the ceiling, at which the little Alfred used to gaze with the mysterious awe which children will attach to any ever-present gloomy inanimate object. One day he was playing in this room with a little kitten, which he unconsciously pinched so as to hurt it. His aunt with great difficulty succeeded in rescuing it from the child, who cried, —'Take your kitten, then; it will scratch you and tear your dress; the beam will fall down on your head, and, as for me, I shall go and dine at Bagneux.' To dine at Bagneux with his great-aunt was then to him the summit of human happiness. In this speech, born of childish petulance, one may, without being over-fanciful, trace the qualities of mind which

afterwards appeared in the poet's works. There are the irritation and discontent with the world as it is, and the power of imagining and combining a series of events which ended with what to their inventor seemed poetical justice.

Another circumstance, which occurred a little later, is also curious. Lord Beaconsfield in his romance, 'Contarini Fleming,' a wonderful analysis of the first growth and after-development of the poetic faculty, has described his hero falling in love in a most desperate fashion at a tender age. Contarini, however, was more than four years old—which was the period of Alfred de Musset's first love affair. It is with a cousin many years older than himself that Lord Beaconsfield's *Contarini Fleming* falls in love; and it was with a cousin yet some years older than himself that Alfred de Musset, at four years, fell in love. She had just finished a story of the events of the war of invasion at Liège, whence she had come, when

the little Musset got up from the sofa, where he was sitting with his toys, and asked who she was.

'"C'est," lui dit on, "une cousine à toi. Elle se nomme Clélie." "Ah elle est à moi," répondit il. "Eh bien, je la prends et je la garde."'

From this time she was constantly employed in telling him stories, of which he never wearied: his affection for her grew day by day until he proposed, with all the earnestness of four years old, that they should be married as soon as he was old enough. When she went away he shed bitter tears; and on her saying, 'Do not forget me;' he replied, 'Forget you! Do you not know that your name is written on my heart with a penknife?'

When this cousin married it was deemed necessary to keep the matter completely secret from little Alfred de Musset—and it was not till years afterwards that he learnt the secret. At this time he was a boy, not

very much older, perhaps, than Lord Beaconsfield's Contarini Fleming. After the first shock of the news he asked tremblingly if it was possible that Clélie could have been only laughing at him. Then, when he was told that she would always love him as a sister, he said gravely, 'Eh bien! je m'en contenterai.' Here one may see already the double character of the extravagantly tender poet, and the extravagantly careless man of the world coming out.

Remembering what Alfred de Musset has said in his 'Confessions d'un Enfant du Siècle' of the Emperor's ultimate influence, it is curious to observe that the impressions of his childhood at this time were of precisely the same nature as those of Béranger's youth. Both the brothers Musset had been brought up to idolise the great Napoleon. M. Paul de Musset speaks in just the same spirit as does Béranger of the horror created by the

news of the capitulation. Madame de Musset, their mother, shared in the estimation of the two children the infallibility of Napoleon, and when, one night in 1815, she said in Paul's hearing,—'This cannot go on—the Bourbons do nothing but blunder — we shall see the Emperor again'— Paul flew to tell the glad news to his brother, and both waited impatiently but confidently for the 20th of March which brought their hero back to them.

'The world,' says M. Paul de Musset, 'was astounded at this event. To us it seemed simple enough.' The brothers long believed, as did many others, that the Emperor would return from St. Helena, even as he had done from Elba; but childhood's memory is short, and Alfred de Musset's excitable imagination soon occupied itself with tales of romance instead of with political events. He and his brother began first to devour every kind of oriental fairy tale they could get hold of, and

built up for themselves with big books and other things an edifice which represented by turns the cave of the Forty Thieves, the mysterious grotto of Aladdin, and the palace of Haroun el Raschid.

Then came a period in which they were devoted to stories of knightly chivalry—when Roland, Amadis, and other heroes of legendary battle were their idols, and occupied far too much of their attention. This was put an end to by a judicious present of 'Don Quixote' being made to the boys by their parents. It seems a pity that Alfred de Musset has not like another poet, Heine, between whom and himself there are certain points of resemblance, made a record of the impressions produced upon him at different ages by reading this wonderful book. Before this time Alfred one day asked his brother with great earnestness what he thought of magic in general, and of the enchanter Merlin

in particular. It was replied to him that in all probability the stories both of Roland and of Merlin were nothing but inventions.

'What a pity,' exclaimed Alfred with a sigh; 'but if we cannot make ourselves invisible, fly swiftly from place to place, and have a genius always at our orders, we can at least construct secret panels, and for want of a magic word employ a spring to reveal a mysterious recess.'

In those days the exploits of Mr. Home and Mrs. Guppy had not been invented, or in them the young poet might possibly have found consolation for the destruction of his belief in the geniuses employed to carry heroes of Eastern fiction through the air from Bagdad to Damascus. As it was he contented himself with the existence of sliding panels and secret chambers, and experienced an intense delight when, visiting an old country house, he actually came upon a concealed room in which fugitives had been hidden.

Except a little song, written when he was fourteen, the first expression in verse of Alfred de Musset's power of imagination was produced in 1828. This was an elegy, of which the design had much grace; and it was soon followed by a ballad and a drama on the same subject. These were suggested by a visit to the *Cénacle* at the house of M. Victor Hugo; and it is curious to observe in such fragments of the work as are preserved the influence of the President of the Romanticist circle. The scene was laid, of course, in Spain —all young authors' scenes were at that time laid in Spain—in the castle of Don Sanchez de Guadarra. His daughter Agnes had been twice betrothed—

'Une main dans sa main deux fois s'était glacée,
Et vierge, elle était veuve, en deuil de deux époux.'

The two young men she had been betrothed to had both died the day after the betrothal. A third husband is proposed, the brave and

brilliant Don Carlos, who comes clanking in with his long sword and his golden spurs. While the ceremony of betrothal goes on a monk dissembles mysteriously in a corner. This monk is Don Juan, brother of Don Carlos, a dark and secret personage, who speaks little, and that vaguely, and of whom it is said—

'Il semblait regarder plus loin que l'horizon.'

After the ceremony Don Juan demands to speak with his brother, and confesses to him that he has a hopeless passion for Agnes, and has poisoned her two former lovers. He begs his brother to give up the engagement; and on his refusal rushes to the wall, takes down a sword, fights his brother, and kills first him, then himself. The romantic school went in for a good deal of killing at that time, in which, to be sure, they were only following the illustrious example of Shakespeare. The lovely Agnes, of course, retired into a convent.

Such was the plan of the first drama ever conceived and executed by Alfred de Musset, which he later condemned to the flames, and of which the outline and a few scattered verses have been preserved by his brother.

His first published poetry appeared in a little newspaper called *Le Provincial*, brought out at Dijon. It was some of this poetry, and the elegy which has been spoken of, which he brought one morning to Sainte-Beuve, with the laughing exclamation, 'Moi aussi je fais des vers,' and read out to him. A few days afterwards, Sainte-Beuve wrote to one of his friends, 'Il y a parmi nous un enfant plein de génie.'

After this he read some of his poetry at the *Cénacle*, where it was received with the utmost encouragement, which, far from turning the young poet's head, made him only wish to prove that he could do better.

Musset now took to living extravagantly and keeping late hours; and when his brother re-

monstrated with him, he replied,—'Précisément parce que je suis jeune j'ai besoin de tout connaître, et je veux tout apprendre par expérience. Je sens en moi deux hommes, l'un qui agit, l'autre qui regarde. Si le premier fait une sottise, le second en profitera.'

The same kind of excuse has been too often used for follies which have certainly led to no good. Musset did no doubt turn his experience to some account; and it must be said that in the midst of his extravagance he was not idle. Sometimes a passing remorse for the time he had wasted seized him, and then he would pull out from a chest an old yellow driving coat with six capes, and, wrapping himself in it, throw himself down on the floor, whence he cried in lamentable tones to any one who visited him, 'Leave me alone with my rags and my despair!'

In the intervals between his butterfly life and his fits of remorse he was at work on the poems afterwards collected and published

under the name of 'Contes d'Espagne;' and he also wrote for M. Mame, the bookseller, a translation of De Quincey's 'Opium-Eater.' His great object was to escape from a clerk's place, which his father had procured for him, and in this he succeeded after the appearance of the 'Contes d'Espagne et d'Italie.'

Not long after this, in 1830, Harel, the manager of the Odéon theatre, begged Musset to write him a piece. The manuscript of 'La Nuit Vénitienne' was submitted to him, and he was delighted with it. The play was put in rehearsal, and produced on the 1st of December. Whether the original and exquisite style of Musset, who has been called by his friend M. Paul Foucher a mixture of Manfred and Cherubino, and who was wont to mask his deepest feeling with a flashing gaiety—whether this was too new and fine for the public, or that a party of the public had really combined to crush the author, or whether, indeed, both these causes

were at work, cannot now be known. But in the second scene of the piece hisses and clamours were heard, which lasted till the great scene which Musset trusted would compel silence and attention. And for a time so it did; but unluckily, at a critical moment, the heroine, standing in the moonlight, leant against a newly painted trellis work, and when she turned round her white satin dress was seen to be covered with a neat green print of the trellis pattern. This was the end of the play. The audience would no longer grant even a chance to the author's beautiful words and piercing penetration of character; and by this unlucky accident Alfred de Musset's dramatic aspirations were checked to an incalculable extent. It was not till seventeen years later that the successful performance of 'Un Caprice' proved how much his genius lay in this direction, and it was not until after his death that he was definitely recognised as one of the finest

dramatic poets of France. A stronger man than Alfred de Musset would probably not have allowed himself to be overcome by such a defeat as the failure of 'Une Nuit Vénitienne;' but a stronger man very likely could not have written just such poetry or prose as he did. Out of the very sickness and discord of his nature came some of his most penetrating work. This is seen, perhaps, better than in any other of his plays in 'Les Caprices de Marianne.' This piece, which owes its title of comedy to the sparkling wit and gaiety that play on the surface of what is in reality a sombre tragedy, contains in the personages of *Célio* and *Octave* an exact representation of the double nature that was ever at work in the poet. *Célio* is desperately in love with *Marianne*. *Octave*, her cousin, laughs at his folly in caring for a woman, but promises to do all he can to help him. *Marianne* falls in love with *Octave* while he urges his friend's suit. *Claudio*, the old and

jealous husband of *Marianne*, sets assassins to slay *Octavè*, and *Célio* falls by mischance in *Octavè's* place, believing in his last moments that he did well to look on life as a tragedy, for that even the friend he trusted has betrayed him to his death. The curtain falls upon *Octavè's* half pitying, half scornful speech to *Marianne*, who stretches out her arms to console him as he laments his friend's fate :—' Je ne vous aime pas, Marianne. C'était Célio qui vous aimait.'

In this play are very many of the qualities distinctive of Alfred de Musset's work. In an article in the *Revue des deux Mondes*, written in 1838, concerning Rachel's performances, the poet pointed out that the war between classicism and romanticism could never end in an absolutely definite victory for either school, nor was it desirable that it should be so. ' It was time,' he said, ' for a third school, which should unite the merits of each.' It will, probably, have struck many who were ignorant of this article

until the publication of M. Paul de Musset's book, that this happy combination of two schools was one of the most striking characteristics of Musset's own plays. 'Les Caprices de Marianne,' as originally played on the stage, with trifling alteration of the author's first arrangement, happens to preserve the classical unities; but that is a minor matter compared with the artistic grafting of the modern development of passion and action on the spirit which gives grandeur to many plays of the classical school. From the very first the reader or spectator is made conscious, in some indefinable way, through all the animation and wit of the dialogue, that there is in the background a grim fate waiting, ready at the proper moment to overtake with its horror the hapless *Octave* as well as the melancholy *Célio*. In these two men we have, as has been said, the two opposing forces of Musset's own nature personified. The speech of *Célio* in the first scene is the very essence of despair and of tenderness.

'Malheur à celui qui au milieu de la jeunesse s'abandonne à un amour sans espoir! Malheur à celui qui se livre à une douce rêverie, avant de savoir où sa chimère le méne, et s'il peut être payé de retour! Mollement couché dans une barque, il s'éloigne peu à peu de la rive; il aperçoit au loin des plaines enchantées, de vertes prairies, et le mirage léger de son Eldorado. Les flots l'entraînent en silence, et quand la réalité le réveille, il est aussi loin du but où il aspire que du rivage qu'il a quitté —il ne peut plus ni poursuivre sa route ni revenir sur ses pas.'

Octave at this moment comes in, and when *Célio* reproaches him with the reckless life he leads, gives a description of his condition which he likens to that of a dancer on a tight-rope, surrounded on every side by pale and hideous phantoms of relations and creditors; a whole legion of monsters plucking at his cloak, and trying to make him lose his balance

'Il continue sa course légère de l'orient à l'occident. S'il regarde en bas la tête lui tourne—s'il regarde en haut le pied lui manque. Il va plus vite que le vent et toutes les mains tendues autour de lui ne lui feront pas renverser une seule goutte de la coupe joyeuse qu'il porte à la sienne. Voilà ma vie mon cher ami — c'est ma fidèle image que tu vois.

Célio.

'Que tu es heureux d'être fou.'

Octave.

'Que tu es fou de ne pas être heureux! Dis-moi un peu toi, qu'est ce qui te manque?'

Célio.

'Il me manque le repos—la douce insouciance qui fait de la vie un miroir où tous les objets se peignent un instant et sur lequel tout glisse. Une dette pour moi est un remords. L'amour dont vous autres vous faites un passe-temps trouble ma vie entière. O mon ami! tu ignoreras toujours ce que c'est qu'aimer comme moi! Mon cabinet d'étude est désert; depuis un mois j'erre autour de cette maison la nuit et le jour. Quel charme j'éprouve an lever de la lune à conduire sous ces pétits arbres au

fond de cette place mon chœur modeste de musiciens—à marquer moi-même la mesure—à les entendre chanter la beauté de Marianne. Jamais elle n'a paru à sa fenêtre, jamais elle n'est venue appuyer son front charmant sur sa jalousie.'

It was not, however, until 1833 that 'Les Caprices de Marianne' was written and published in the *Revue des deux Mondes*—six weeks only after the appearance in the same magazine of another drama, 'André del Sarto.' Meanwhile the poet had made up for his failure as a playwright by his success in other directions, and other things of a more tragic nature than the failure of his piece had befallen him.

In 1832 his father died of cholera; and Alfred de Musset, after much reflection, announced to his brother that he had formed a resolution. This was that he would publish one more volume of poetry, and that if in the result of this he did not see the prospect of a future assured livelihood, he would enlist either

in the Lancers or Hussars, in order to give his share of his father's property, which was not too large, to his mother and sister.

The volume entitled, 'Un Spectacle dans un Fauteuil,' was written and published; and though it really showed a distinct advance in the poet's art, it was received by the fickle French public with far less attention than they had given to the 'Contes d'Espagne.' The author was no longer new; and few of the critics cared to devote attention to examining the progress made by a young and rising talent. These few were headed by Sainte-Beuve, who took the pains to discover in the work the fresh beauties it possessed, and whose example found a limited number of imitators. Other critics, who were no longer in the mood to praise the poet, did not, indeed, dare to deny his talent, but accused him of having derived it from Lord Byron, and other poets to whom he had even less resemblance, while they re-

proached him with expressing no conviction, with aiming at no definite end. 'What does he mean?' they said, 'what is his object? Is a serious century like ours to be employed by people who take up art as an amusement? It is a bad moment to choose for speaking thus slightingly of things which agitate the whole of humanity. If the author has any belief, let him express it; if not, he never can be more than an amateur poet.' This reproach, as M. Paul de Musset well observes, seems ludicrous indeed, when one remembers that Musset is the one poet who has expressed, with as much exactitude as beauty, the doubts, the sorrows, and the inspirations with which the time he lived in was filled. However, the critics were for some reason determined to find fault with him, and they pitched upon this point for want of a better.

It was more important to him to win the approbation of the new generation of readers

than that of the critics, and in this he succeeded so well that he was soon engaged on the staff of the *Revue des deux Mondes*. About this time there was a house in Paris at which the rising talent of the day was accustomed to assemble; and where were indulged all those harmless practical jokes, disguises, deceptions, and what not, which are wont to be popular among young men who want an outlet for their spirits or a rest from brain-work. On one occasion, Debureau, a famous Pierrot, appeared as a distinguished English diplomatist—a character which he supported by dint of an imposing silence, and a stiff but dignified aspect.

On this occasion Alfred de Musset represented a Norman servant girl. None but those in the secret suspected any mystification, until the English diplomatist, who had hitherto spoken only in monosyllables, was pressed for his opinion on the political prospect.

'You wish to know,' he said, 'what I think

of the present balance of affairs in Europe, having regard to the grave political situation. I will tell you, and I will make myself as clear as possible.' Thus saying, the respected member of the House of Commons took up a plate, spun it into the air, and caught it adroitly on the point of his knife, where he kept it spinning for several seconds. 'That,' he observed, 'is the image of the present European equilibrium.'

At the same moment the Norman peasant girl upset plates and knives in all directions; and, in the midst of the general astonishment and turmoil, left off waiting at table, and sat down to dinner.

On another day, a certain M. Chaudesaigues came into the room, where he found among others a fair young man, who listened to him with the greatest attention while he made a display of his critical powers, and nodded in approbation, while he commented on the folly

which led the public to run after 'Rolla,' 'Namouna,' and other works by the same author and of the same calibre. When from literary he was about to pass to personal criticisms, the lady of the house interrupted him with, 'Let me introduce you to M. Alfred de Musset, whose acquaintance I have long wished you to make.' The joke sounds a somewhat cruel one, but those who played it knew quite well beforehand that neither Musset nor Chaudesaigues were likely to cherish any disagreeable recollections of it.

The house where all this innocent mirth took place was the house of one who had a great influence on Musset's life, and with whom, not long after his first introduction there, he set out on a journey to Italy. Those who will can read from two points of view the story of that journey in 'Lui et Elle,' and in 'Elle et Lui.'

What is now desirable is to observe how the weakness and the tenderness of his character

came out in his self-abandonment to grief when he returned from Italy alone.

'I thought at first,' he wrote long afterwards, 'that I knew neither regret nor sorrow. I found a pride at first to support me; but hardly had I looked around me when I saw a desert. I was seized with an unexpected grief. It seemed to me that all my thoughts fell like dead leaves, while I know not what unknown impression of sadness and tenderness possessed my soul. When I saw that I could no longer strive with it, I abandoned myself to my sorrow in despair. I broke with all my old habits. I shut myself up in my room, where I spent four months in constant weeping, seeing no one, and having no distraction but a game at chess, which I played mechanically every evening.

'My grief gradually subsided, my tears dried, my sleeplessness ceased. I grew to know and to love melancholy. Calm once more, I threw

my eyes on all that I had left. In reading the first book which I took up, I found that all was changed. The past no longer existed, or, at least, I found nothing to resemble it. An old picture, a tragedy I knew by heart, a romance read a hundred times, a talk with a friend—all these things surprised me. I no longer felt them as I had been wont to. I then knew what experience meant, and I felt that by suffering one arrives at truth. This was a splendid moment in my life, and I rest on it with pleasure. Yes, it was splendid, though harsh. I have not told you the details of my love history. If I wrote it, it might be as good as many another; but of what use would it be? My mistress was dark—she had fine eyes. I loved her—she left me—I suffered, and wept for four months. Is not that enough to tell?'

The beauty in the original of this passage may carry one away for the time; but consideration may make one think that, for the

words :—'When I saw that I could no longer strive with my grief,' the poet might have written :—'When I chose to give up the struggle, and drape myself in a dramatic melancholy ;' and that the suffering through which he says he learnt truth was really self-imposed, and taught him but a small part of the truth he thought he had grasped.

M. Paul de Musset, who loved his brother deeply, tells us that his boasted love of melancholy was nothing but a disguise for the terrible reality of his sorrow. But one is the more inclined to think that it was partly at any rate assumed for mere effect on finding that the passion of that exquisite work, the 'Nuit de Décembre,' written within about twelve months of this time, refers, not as is generally supposed, to her whom Musset left in Italy, but to another and quite a different woman.

It is, however, perhaps more interesting to

dwell on Alfred de Musset's works than on the history of his many love affairs. Passing over a comparatively short time we come to 1838, when there appeared in Paris two geniuses, Rachel and Mlle. Pauline Garcia, whose power Musset was one of the first, if not the very first, to fully recognise in print. There was for a long time a project of his writing a play for Rachel; but his nature and hers were not calculated to meet without occasional explosions, and the recurrence of these prevented the project from being ever more than begun. It was at about this time that Musset, yielding to the prudent entreaties of his brother and of M. Bonnaire, the manager of the *Revue des deux Mondes*, agreed to leave for a time his loved but unprofitable poetry, and to supply three prose stories to the *Revue* in the course of the next three months, at very advantageous terms.

Musset was at first delighted with the

notion of shaking off his embarrassments, but the next day he took a different view of the matter. He greeted his brother with reproaches, exclaiming,—'You have made me a machine for producing thought, a serf bound to the soil; a galley slave condemned to hard labour.' While he poured out a torrent of eloquent extravagance, his brother listened quietly, and when he had done reminded him that he had before this written prose stories, which had not seemed so very terrible an undertaking, and that he, Paul, had never known him look or feel like a galley slave. 'Tout a l'heure—s'écria-t-il—je serais dans cet état, si je vous écoutais. Il ne me manque pour y tomber que de remplir mes engagements. Rendez-moi mes embarras et mes créanciers. Je veux avoir des dettes, moi; je veux manger de la vache enragée si cela me plâit; qu'on me reconduise aux carrières!'

Musset gradually calmed down, as was his wont; and all might have gone well with the project for the three prose stories, but for an unfortunate accident which put in his way a *feuilleton* of the then new style, which is unhappily too common now. 'With an astonishing sagacity,' writes M. Paul de Musset, 'three years in advance he divined that this new kind of literature would bring about a revolution, and have a profoundly corrupting influence on the public taste. "There," he cried, as he showed me the *feuilleton*, "look at this, and tell me if imaginative literature can live when people so brutalise their readers and themselves." I tried to point out to him that other writers were not responsible for the blunders of this *feuilleton;* and that the author of *Emmeline* need not fear to be confounded with the manufacturers of such stuff as this. "Do you not see," he answered, "that this housemaid's literature will generate

a whole new world of ignorant and half-savage readers? I know well enough that it will die one day of its own excesses; but before that it will have disgusted finer minds with reading. Meanwhile I cast it off—I will have nothing in common between it and me—not even the instruments of work. I will never touch a pen again. Thank God! to write a verse one wants nothing but a piece of chalk or the burnt end of a match!"'

However, some time afterwards, Musset conquered his repugnance to prose, and began a work which was never finished, and of which some fragments only remain, called 'Le Poète Dèchu.' This was a wild story of a young man full of talents, with sisters dependent on him. He became by turns a novelist, a painter, and a musician; and was baulked in each career by the necessity of cramping his genius to supply his daily needs. At last, almost despairing of making his power re-

cognised, he resolved to leave behind him a history of his life which should make him remembered; and, with this design, he travelled to Switzerland, and there, in a little inn room, wrote his memoirs. How the story was to end was not determined; but one must regret that it was never finished, for, in spite of its obvious inconsistency and weakness, what remains of it is full of fine thought and expression.

The great difficulty which presented itself was to account for a man of such great and varied talents never having made them felt. It was proposed to get out of this by making him, in his last moments, paint a portrait, compose a piece of music, and write a poem, all of which should be recognised as great works by some person of taste. To this Musset, on very reasonable grounds, objected, and proposed to save his hero from suicide and lead him to fame through the love of a girl who was to hear him singing his own composition. In the next

year to these events Musset was attacked by an inflammation of the lungs, which kept him long to his bed; and the year after he wrote and published in the *Revue de Paris* his celebrated answer to Becker, 'Le Rhin Allemand,' and, curiously enough, in the same year, Sainte-Beuve, criticising the poets of the age in the *Revue des deux Mondes*, placed Musset in the third order of poets—a judgment which, it must be said, he afterwards completely reversed.

It was five or six years after this that Musset's piece, 'Un Caprice,' was suddenly announced for representation at the Théâtre Français. The history of this is curious. Mme. Allan, an actress of great distinction, had been for some time playing at the Court theatre in St. Petersburg. She was advised by a friend to go and see, at one of the minor theatres, a Russian piece, which would exactly suit her. She went, was delighted, and was on the point of having the piece translated into

French, when some one pointed out that the trouble would be useless, for that the piece was originally French, and was nothing else than the 'Caprice' of Alfred de Musset.

On Mme. Allan's return to the Théâtre Français in 1844, she solicited this piece to appear in, and its success was followed by that of 'Il Faut qu'une Porte soit ouverte ou Fermée,' and of 'Il ne faut jurer de rien.' 'Le Chandelier' also was played, but was forbidden, after forty representations, by the Minister.

It was not, however, until after the poet's death, which was caused in 1857 by a disease of the heart, that his works received full justice either on or off the stage. It has been said that in 'Les Caprices de Marianne' are found many of the qualities distinctive of the poet. 'La Nuit d'Octobre' is another work of extraordinary beauty, written in another spirit. This, which is nothing but a dialogue between

the poet and the Muse, was produced at the Théâtre Français on the anniversary of the poet's death.

The audience were struck not only by the beauty of the work and its admirable interpretation by Mlle. Favart and M. Delaunay, but also by the striking personal likeness to Alfred de Musset which M. Delaunay managed to present. One of Musset's friends, M. Paul Foucher, says that the poet's appearance was reproduced 'avec une réalité effrayante.'

The dialogue consists of the despairing lament of the poet for his lost love, mixed with expressions of wild hatred for the woman who has betrayed him, and of the Muse's consolations and encouragement—

> 'Si l'effort est trop grand pour la faiblesse humaine
> De pardonner les maux qui nous viennent d'autrui
> Epargne-toi du moins le tourment de la haîne,
> A défaut du pardon laisse venir l'oubli.'

So says the Muse at the beginning of a long

speech, through which the same idea runs; and the poet replies to her in a speech which is too long to quote, but which can be easily referred to.

It shows the finer side of Alfred de Musset's strangely wayward genius and character; and for that reason I hope that my readers may be induced to look at it for themselves.

VICTOR HUGO.

VICTOR HUGO.

In the year 1828, a company of distinguished English actors went over to perform Shakespeare's plays in Paris, and their representations attracted—among a crowd of well-known and unknown people—a young clerk, who has left in his memoirs an account of the impression produced upon him. 'They announced Hamlet. I knew only that of Ducis. I went to see that of Shakespeare. It was this which I sought—which was wanting to my existence; it was these players forgetting they were on a stage; it was this life of fiction becoming actual by the power of art; it was this reality of word and gesture which made actors human beings, with their virtues, their

passions, and their weaknesses—and not stilted heroes, impassive, declamatory, and sententious. I read, I devoured the library of the foreign stage, and I saw that in the world of the theatre all sprung from Shakespeare, as in the real world all springs from the sun. I saw that none could be compared to him, for he was as dramatic as Corneille; as comic as Molière; as original as Calderon; as thoughtful as Goethe; as passionate as Schiller. I saw that his works alone included as many types as the works of all other writers. I saw, indeed, that in the power of creation Shakespeare came next to God.'

The writer of this passage was Alexandre Dumas, the earlier and greater possessor of that name; and his opinions as to Shakespeare were fully shared by another poet of that time, who was allied with him in the great battle soon to be fought by the romantic against the classical school. Could the then unwritten works

of this other poet have been placed before Dumas at the same time with Shakespeare's, he might have added to his final sentence that in the power of creation next to Shakespeare came Victor Hugo. No poet of modern times has, to my thinking, been gifted with so vast a power of imagination, of grasp of character, of dramatic force, and of command over verse. It is said in treating of Béranger that the comparison between Béranger and Shakespeare suggested by a scholarly and brilliant writer will not hold good; neither with exactitude, at least, will that now suggested between Shakespeare and Victor Hugo. In one important quality which distinguishes Shakespeare from other poets—the comic, which is to the full as marvellous as the tragic element in his works—in this quality the French poet is wanting. Of grim humour he is a master; playfulness is found constantly in his songs and shorter pieces of verse; irony and satire

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he can deal in at will. But of what we understand by comic force—the force which produces such a character as Falstaff, or such a play as 'Twelfth Night'—there is nothing in Victor Hugo. He has, however, much of the immense power to knit together character and event in splendid verse; to place images of surpassing grandeur before the reader's or hearer's eye; and to make the creatures of his brain as important as those of real life, that belonged to Shakespeare. Even in the defects of the French poet one may trace some resemblance between him and the great English master. Gross blunders may be found scattered through his works, blunders which seem due to the restless sweep of his genius, too impatient to suffer any delay for so trivial a thing as correctness of fact. We laugh when Victor Hugo tells us in *L'Homme qui rit* of the wapentake and the iron weapon; describes in 'Les Travailleurs de la Mer' how

Gilliatt, by way of serenading his mistress played on 'le bugpipe l'air mélancolique de "Bonnie Dundee;"' and translates the Firth of Forth with laboured explanation as 'Le Premier de la Quatrième;' but we do not laugh at Shakespeare's speaking of Giulio Romano as a great sculptor. In the one case the grandeur and beauty of the poetry make us indifferent to the poet's carelessness, and so might they in the other, but that in Victor Hugo's negligence there is a strange air of painstaking and self-satisfaction.

Other defects which at times mar his work, and of which there is little, if any, trace in Shakespeare, are the want of the logical faculty which betrays him into many inconsistencies, and the absence of the sense of proportion, which leads him to devote whole chapters at the most exciting points of his prose romances to displaying the knowledge he has acquired on out-of-the-way subjects.

At the period at which Dumas wrote the passage which has been quoted on Shakespeare, the time was ripe for the advent in France of the romantic school, and the destruction, which was not accomplished without a long struggle, of the complete adherence to classic forms which so long narrowed the scope of French poetry. Théophile Gautier writes of this time:—

'It is impossible to imagine the degree of insignificance and poverty that literature had arrived at. Painting was not in a very much better state. The last pupils of David went on spreading their mawkish colours to reproduce his faded designs. The classical party thought it very fine; but while they looked at these great works, their admiration did not prevent them from putting their hands to their mouths to hide a yawn—a circumstance which did not render them any more indulgent towards artists of the new school, whom they

called tattooed savages, and accused of painting with a drunken broom. Their insults were not allowed to drop; in return for their sayings we called them mummies, and between the two parties existed a cordial detestation.'

It was in the midst of this state of things that there appeared first in 1829, at the Théâtre Français—the home of classical tragedy—Dumas's 'Henri III. et sa Cour,' a romantic drama of extraordinary force in prose; and afterwards Hugo's 'Hernani,' which, being written in verse, was far more shocking to the classical partisans. Hugo had before this tried his hand at a drama, the history of which is interesting.

Some three years before the production of 'Hernani,' Baron Taylor, Commissioner-Royal of the Comédie Française, met the young poet in the streets, and asked him why he never wrote for the stage.

'I was thinking of so doing,' he replied;

'and indeed I have begun a drama on the subject of Cromwell.'

'Then finish it,' said Taylor, 'and let me have it; your "Cromwell" can only be played by Talma.'

To decide the matter, it was arranged that the young poet and the veteran actor should meet at dinner. Talma at this time was sixty-five; he was worn and suffering, and the end which was soon to come had made its approach felt. When he met Victor Hugo he spoke bitterly of his profession; actors, he said, were not men—even he, despite his success and fame, was not a man.

'Applauded,' he said, 'and treated as a friend by the Emperor, I asked him to give me the cross of the Legion of Honour, and he did not dare to do so.'

This, it may be noted, became the subject of a song once popular in France, in which the Emperor is the speaker, and of which the

refrain makes him repeat all his great achievements, concluding each with a regret that he has done it 'Sans avoir décoré Talma.' The last verse tells how a traveller passing through the solitary island of St. Helena heard these words pronounced 'par une voix non plus humaine :—"Sans avoir décoré Talma je suis mort à Sainte Héléne."'

Talma, however, when Victor Hugo saw him, knew nothing of these regrets, and was very much out of humour with his position as an actor. Even in his profession, he said, the player reaches no goal. The poet made some deprecatory exclamation.

'No,' continued Talma, 'a player is nothing without a part, and I have never had a real part; I have never had such pieces as I ought to have had to play. Our tragedies are very splendid, and noble, and grand; but I should have liked as much grandeur with more reality. I should have liked a character who had all

the variety and movement of human life—who was not cast in one stiff mould; a character who should be tragic, and yet belong to everyday life; a being who should still be a man. For instance, did you ever see me in "Charles VI.?" When I cried, "Bread! I want bread!" there was a great effect; and that was because in the king's pain he ceased to be an abstract king—he was suffering what is common to humanity—you had tragedy and truth, sovereignty and wretchedness, a king and a mendicant at the same time. Truth! that is what I have sought all my life. But what can one do? I ask for Shakespeare, and they give me Ducis. The want of truth in plays has driven me to make my costume at least truthful, and that is why I played Marius with bare legs. No one can tell what I might have been, had I found the author I wanted. I shall die without having really played one part. You, M. Hugo, you are

young and daring—you should write me a part. Taylor tells me you have been writing a Cromwell. That is a part I always wanted to play. What is your piece like? It must surely be something new.'

'What it has been your dream to act,' said M. Victor Hugo, 'it has been my dream to write.' Then he unfolded some of the ideas he was going to incorporate in the preface to 'Cromwell,' the substitution of the new drama for the old tragedy—of living men for conventional types. The piece was to leap freely from the heroic to the familiar. It was to include every style that could be attractive—epic, lyric, satiric, serious, burlesque; tirades and verses written merely for effect were to be suppressed.

Here Talma interrupted, —'That is just what I am tired of trying to make them understand. No more fine verses. And your "Cromwell" is written on this plan?'

'So much so,' said the poet, 'that to mark at once its intention of reality, the first line consists of a date: "Demain vingt cinq juin mil six cent cinquante sept."'

'You must surely have some scenes by heart,' said Talma. 'Do be kind enough to repeat one.'

The recitation was given, and Talma, delighted, begged the author to finish the play quickly. But unhappily the great actor died but a short time after, without fulfilling his dream of acting a natural part. A better fate awaited the poet. 'Cromwell' when finished took so large a form that it was impracticable for stage representation, but its publication as a book was one of the first notes of defiance sounded by the new school. The preface particularly, which boldly expressed the author's views, and his admiration of Shakespeare, excited a storm of indignation among the classical party.

'What is remarkable,' said the *Gazette de France*, 'in the very first lines of this preface is the tone of scornful pride with which a young author, whose reputation is as yet confined to a few friendly circles, speaks of everyone whose ideas are different to his own. There was a time when he was content to produce odes like everybody else. He was then satisfied to gather beforehand the laurels which his early attempts seemed to promise him, and which, to use the language of the romantic school, are as yet unculled.

'Now things have changed. The modest young poet has become a professor, lecturing confidently to an audience which does not exist. Who is it that dreams of reviving this old and tiresome question of the classic and the romantic, which has been settled long since, and of which we have had enough and to spare? There are only two men, M. Hugo and M. Darlincourt, who have worked

on the same lines, and used almost identical expressions. If there is any difference between the two, it is to the advantage of the latter, whose prose seems to us far better in its good taste and simplicity than that of the author of "Cromwell." This author's avowed design is, "To break all the spiders' webs with which the Lilliputians have tried to tie up the drama during its sleep;" or, in plain language, to rid himself of the three unities. We may point out to the author, that in this Lilliputian world there are some dwarfs who are not altogether despicable. Amongst others, everyone who has written for the stage since the Cid to the days of Cromwell. But what can such men be to him who calls Shakespeare (whose very name he cannot spell) the God of the theatre? Those people who do not share the author's ideas on this point—and their number we fancy will be considerable—cannot at least deny them novelty.

This is surely the first time that it has occurred to anyone to place the author of a few loose and witty plays on the same level as Molière and Corneille.'

The writer of this article was probably as unaware that Corneille was one of the first to make a move in the direction of romantic drama—and wanted nothing but courage and self-sacrifice to carry out his intention—as he was that there was more than one way of spelling Shakespeare's name. It is however curious to find that, so short a time ago as 1827 or 1828, a large proportion of literary people in France considered Shakespeare to be the author of some few loose and witty plays far below Molière and Corneille in merit.

A short time before the publication of 'Cromwell,' the romantic school had been delighted, and the classical horrified, by the production of Weber's 'Freyschütz,' a work in which may be found the theory of allying drama and music,

which some of Herr Wagner's disciples claim as his invention.

After Weber came Shakespeare, and the news of the arrival of an English company who were to act Shakespeare's plays created an intense excitement. M. Eugène Delacroix wrote to Victor Hugo: 'It is a general invasion. Hamlet raises his hideous head—Othello already prepares his murderous pillow in defiance of all the decent regulations of our stage. And, who can tell? perhaps even King Lear is going to tear out his eyes before a French audience.' (This passage will serve to show how intimately acquainted were French men of literary pretensions with the works they professed to decry.) 'The Academy,' went on the writer, 'would do well to pronounce that the importation of such stuff is hurtful to public morals. Good taste has evidently seen its last day.'

However, the storm raised by the publication

of 'Cromwell' was nothing to that excited by the representation of 'Hernani,' which was written in a surprisingly short time after 'Marion de Lorme' had been forbidden by the censorship. Even the rehearsals of this piece were full of difficulties and dangers. Mlle. Mars, who had the important part of *Doña Sol*, was, by dint of long custom, devoted to the classical school, and lost no opportunity of worrying the author about lines which to her seemed odd. Alexandre Dumas has left an account of the kind of thing which used to go on. In the middle of a rehearsal Mlle. Mars would stop and say,—'Excuse me. I want to speak a word to the author.' Then coming forward to the orchestra, where she had seen him all the time, she would pretend to look for him in every direction, and say, 'Are you there, M. Hugo?' When she had chosen to satisfy herself of his existence, she said, 'M. Hugo, I have to speak this line: "Vous êtes mon lion

superbe et généreux."' 'Yes, madame.' 'Well, M. Hugo, do you really like that? It seems so odd to me to call M. Firmin *mon lion.*' This went on until the poet was goaded into asking to have Mlle. Mars's part returned to him. Then the great actress, unaccustomed to such daring, became comparatively tame. Meanwhile, the piece was criticised and burlesqued from outside before it was produced. People came in the disguise of admirers to the poet's house, and obtained from him by force of importunity a scene or two, which they carried home on purpose to caricature. One of the minor theatres brought out a skit on the play before the original had appeared.

On the day of the first representation, the 25th February 1830, the great battle began. Victor Hugo, with all the generous imprudence of a daring mind, refused to have any of the organised paid applause which has but lately been discontinued at the Théâtre Français.

But with a curious and characteristic inconsistency he gave special tickets to a band of devoted admirers.

'We thought we had never been happy before,' writes Théophile Gautier, who was one of this band, 'when Gérard distributed to us six little squares of red paper branded with the word "Hierro," which is the Spanish for iron.' Similar squares to these were distributed amongst many followers of the new school, and it was arranged that this contingent of the romantic party should be admitted before the rest of the public. Unfortunately they were admitted so long before that it became necessary for them to dine in the theatre; and when the usual audience, containing an enormous number of the classical party, came in, they found the pit of the theatre converted into a kind of Bohemian tavern. This was a bad beginning, and had the further bad effect of putting Mlle. Mars out of humour.

What followed is told in detail in another of these papers, and it will be enough here to note the fact that the first representation was, in spite of all disadvantages, a triumphant success, but that the theatre became a battle-field for the opposing parties for forty-four nights, on which the play was given subsequently, after which the struggle was put an end to by the departure of Mlle. Mars.

Eight years afterwards, when it was revived, and warmly applauded, two spectators, who remembered its first production, talked as they went down stairs :—

'The success is not surprising,' said one; 'he has changed the whole play.'

'You are mistaken,' said the other; 'it is not the play he has changed, but the public.'

The success of the first representations with the new school had brought M. Victor Hugo so many visitors, that his landlady begged him to change his lodgings, as, with all her respect

for him and his family, she really could not endure the constant trampling of feet on her stairs. Among these visitors was Théophile Gautier, who states that so deep was his awe for the great poet, that he twice approached his door and retreated in terror, before the sudden appearance of the poet on the threshold compelled him to take courage.

M. Gosselin, a bookseller, came also among these visitors, to buy the right of publishing 'Hernani,' and was much offended both at finding it sold, and at the way in which Mme. Hugo, who was unaware of his importance, received him. By way of revenge, he insisted on the immediate carrying out of an agreement made with him by the poet, to let him have, by a certain time, a romance called 'Notre Dame de Paris.' The book was not begun at the time when it ought to have been delivered, and damages would have been claimed by M. Gosselin but for the interven-

tion of M. Bastin, who procured five months' grace for the author. This time was again extended by reason of the Revolution of 1830; but it was absolutely necessary that the book should be ready by the 1st February 1831.

It has been seen how Alfred de Musset behaved when he had been induced to bind himself to a contract of this kind. The behaviour of M. Victor Hugo was as different as were the characters and feelings of the two men. He bought a large bottle of ink, and a woollen garment which covered him from neck to feet. In this he clothed himself, having locked up everything that he could wear out of doors, and sat down in a heavy frame of mind to write his novel. Once only he went out, on the 20th December, to a stormy sitting of the Chamber of Peers, and then, rather than disinter his ordinary clothes, he went in the uniform of a National Guard. The book ap-

peared on the 13th February, and because it had exactly exhausted his supply of ink, the author proposed to call it 'A Bottle of Ink:' a title which was afterwards adopted by Alphonse Karr for a work of his.

Among other letters which its author received is one to this effect:—

'MY DEAR HUGO,—I send you a strong, broad-shouldered man. Do not fear to load him. He will bring me back "Notre Dame de Paris," which I long to read, because every one is talking of it, and because it is your work. I warn you that I have no love for descriptive writing; and I know that I shall therefore be a very bad judge of part of your book. But as to the rest, I am sure to be what you know I am for all your productions.—Yours cordially, and as long as I live, BÉRANGER.'

The Revolution, which retarded the production of 'Notre Dame de Paris,' had also put

an end to the censorship which forbade the performance of 'Marion de Lorme.' Immediately after the Revolution—that is in August 1830, Mlle. Mars, with MM. Armand and Firmin, had called on the author and represented to him that this was the very time to produce the piece—the fourth act especially, which had been singled out by Charles X. as a thing not to be acted, was sure to find favour with the public. But on this very account the poet then refused to have the play performed. In spite of the opinions he had for long upheld, he could not forget that in his early days he had belonged to the party of the Royalists and of Vendée—and he would not have it said of him, as however unjustly it might be, that he had joined in abuse of the King. However, by the spring of 1831 things had changed. It was no longer Charles X. who was the object of popular opposition, and M. Hugo had no

longer any reason to keep his drama off the stage. Mlle. Mars, abandoning all her haughtiness, came to beg for it, on the ground that she had rehearsed it, and that what she had done for *Doña Sol* in 'Hernani' gave her a claim to the part of 'Marion de Lorme.'

M. Hugo, however, would give her no promise, and remembering his difficulties at the Théâtre Français, signed an agreement with the Porte St. Martin, the result of which was that 'Marion de Lorme' was played there. Various causes combined against its obtaining a great success. Frédérick Lemâitre was to have played *Didier*, the part acted in a late revival at the Français by M. Mounet-Sully; but he had left the theatre, and the part was given to Bocage, who took no great fancy to it, partly because Alexandre Dumas's 'Antony' had been produced just before; and between the sombre characters of *Antony* which Bocage had played and of *Didier*, there

was a considerable resemblance. This likeness gave opportunity for an ill-natured report that *Didier* was a plagiarism of *Antony*, although really 'Marion de Lorme' was written some time before Dumas's play. The piece then, from these causes, and from unfortunate accidents, of indisposition among the actors, and political disturbances, had no popular success.

On the 1st of June the poet began another play—one of his greatest—'Le Roi s'Amuse,' and this he was persuaded by Baron Taylor to give to the Théâtre Français. The play is known to English audiences by means of Mr. Tom Taylor's piece, 'The Fool's Revenge,' which is taken from it, and of Verdi's opera of 'Rigoletto.' In the original the Duke of the opera is King Francis I., and the climax of the piece in both cases is the scène where the court jester, having discovered that his daughter has been betrayed

by his master, gloats over what he takes to be the body of that master assassinated by his means. The body is in truth that of the daughter, who has sacrificed herself to save her lover. This scene is singularly striking, and I have ventured to attempt a translation of *Triboulet's* great speech. *Triboulet* the jester, the Rigoletto of the opera, is alone upon the stage—

'Now shall I be avenged—the time has come.
A month shall I have waited and have spied,
Still a buffoon, hiding my heart's deep woe
And weeping blood beneath my jester's mask.
What weather! 'Tis a night for mystery—
Tempest in heaven; murder on the earth.
Here am I great! To-night my fiery rage
Goes hand in hand with that which burns on high!
How great too is the monarch that I kill,
The master of a score of other kings,
A king whose hands grant peace and war at will.
Upon him hangs the weight of all the world,
And all will bend and break when he is gone.
My hand it is that draws this rivet out
And sets all Europe rocking in despair.
Think, if to-morrow God should cry to earth,—

"What new volcano opes its sulphurous jaws?
Who is it thus shakes Turk and Christian,
Clement and Doria, Charles and Suleiman?
Is't Christ or Cæsar, prophecy or war,
That hurls the nations on each other's ranks?
Who guides the arm that rocks thee at its will?"
Earth will make answer, trembling—"Triboulet."
Now, poor buffoon, rejoice in thy fierce pride,
A madman's vengeance sets the world ashake!
There he is—dead. Would I could see him now!
No matter—it can be none else but he;
See! here his spurs have pierced the sack—'tis he.
Now, world, look well on this: here's a buffoon
And here a king, the mightiest of kings!
I hold him here beneath my very feet,
This sack his cere-cloth, and the Seine his tomb!
Who is it that has done it? I alone,
Though I can scarce believe I've won the day,
And none will hold it true when all is known.
What will the future say? What long surprise
Among the nations when the deed is told!
Fate! thou dost set us here and snatch us hence!
The highest of all human majesties,
Francis of Valois, prince of fiery heart,
Charles the Fifth's rival, King of France! a god!
All but eternal! Such a warrior
Whose step could shake a fortress to its base,
The man of Marignan, who, all the night,
Urged on the onset of the clashing troops,
And when the morn came, in his blood-stained hands

Had but one hilt to show of three vast swords,
This king, whose glory starred the universe,
O God! How swiftly will he disappear,
Snatched sudden hence e'en at his triumph's height,
With all his name, and fame, and court's applause,
Like an unwelcome child of shame, at night,
By hands unknown with thunder-claps for knell.
This court, this age, this dynasty mere smoke!
This king, who rose in a resplendent dawn,
Flashed up, and out, like one of those forked flames!
Perchance to-morrow criers with vain breath,
Laden with heaps of gold, will course the towns
And cry to wondering crowds who pass them by,
"This to the man who brings us back the king!"
'Tis strange. My daughter, O my poor wronged child,
See, he is punished; see, thou art avenged.
I thirsted for his blood; there's use in gold
To buy it. Murderer, canst thou hear me yet?
My daughter, who by far outweighs your crown;
My daughter, who had hurt no living soul;
You longed for her, and took her for your own,
And gave her back in shame and wretchedness.
Say, do you hear me? Yes, 'tis marvellous—
Yes, it is I who laugh in my revenge!
Because I feigned to have forgotten all
You fell asleep. You thought, O dullest dupe,
To pluck the venom from a father's wrath.
No! In this fight you raised between us two—
Between the weak and strong—the weak has won.

He who once licked your feet now gnaws your heart.
I hate you ; do you hear me, gallant king ?
That madman—that buffoon, that half a man,
That doubtful animal that you called dog !
'Tis thus, when vengeance holds us—mark you this,
E'en in the deadest heart there's no more sleep ;
The lowest rises and the basest shines,
And the slave draws his hate from out its sheath ;
The cat to tiger turns, the fool to headsman !
Go ! seek in the stream's depths, that are your grave,
Some flood to bear you back to St. Denis !
The river for King Francis.'

(*The King's voice is heard outside singing*)—

'Ha ! Whose voice
Is that ? It is the night's illusions—mock me !'

The rest of the act is not very happily arranged. The daughter, who has been murdered in the king's place, revives for a short time, in order to hold a dialogue half in and half out of the sack with her father—an incident in dislike of which it is perhaps possible to sympathise with the classical school. M. Victor Hugo had not attended the re-

hearsals of the play, and the consequence of this was, that all kinds of details went wrong in the performance, and helped to make the play a failure. At the end M. Paul Delaroche, who did not know M. Victor Hugo, came into the dressing-room of Mlle. Anais, the actress of *Blanche*, where Victor Hugo was sitting. 'What a failure!' he cried; 'but then what a piece! However, at last we shall get rid of this Victor Hugo.' Mlle. Anais, after making signs to him in vain, was obliged to tell him that the poet was present. M. Delaroche made frantic efforts to repair his blunder—the noise, he said, had prevented him from hearing. His opinion, of course, was worth nothing, but still even through all the din he had caught some 'superb passages!' The poet stopped him just as 'Le Roi s'Amuse' was becoming a masterpiece.

Next day the play was forbidden by the Minister. It was followed at various in-

tervals by 'Lucréce Borgia,' 'Marie Tudor,' 'Angelo,' 'Ruy Blas,' and 'Les Burgraves.' The first two were given at the Porte St. Martin, 'Angelo' at the Théâtre Français, 'Ruy Blas' at the Renaissance, and 'Les Burgraves' was performed at the Français. The Renaissance was a new theatre, and the manager, among other improvements, wished to do away entirely with footlights, saying that a light from above would be far more natural, and give an absolutely real effect to the scene. Victor Hugo replied that this crude reality of representation would war with the poetic reality of the piece—that the drama was not natural life, but life transformed by art, and that the actors also should be transformed. This transformation, begun by paint and powder, was carried out by the footlights, which made a natural boundary between the real and the ideal. This is curious in its resemblance to some remarks made by Addison in a number of the *Spectator*, where

it is said, 'A little skill in criticism would inform us that shadows and realities ought not to be mixed together in the same piece. If one would represent a wide champaign country filled with flocks and herds, it would be ridiculous to draw the country only upon the scenes, and to crowd several parts of the stage with sheep and oxen. This is joining together inconsistencies, and making the decorations partly real, and partly imaginary.' 'Les Burgraves,' written in 1842, was the poet's last theatrical venture. Much that is curious and interesting might be told of the history of all these plays; but enough has been said to show how perseveringly and courageously M. Hugo struggled for the cause of the romantic school, and finally conquered.

It may be interesting, before leaving the subject of 'Hernani,' to see what was thought of Victor Hugo in the earlier days of the romantic school by an English writer of some

critical power. Mrs. Trollope, in her book 'The Parisians,' published in 1836, acknowledged that there are 'startling, bold, and stirring incidents' in Victor Hugo's 'disgusting dramas,' but she could not away with 'his clinging fondness for scenes of vice and horror, and his utter contempt for all that time has stamped as good in taste or feeling,' and she 'might say that of him France was ashamed.' She was astounded at a criticism in an English paper which ranked 'Notre Dame' with the Waverley Novels, and 'truly believes' that 'there is not a single pure, innocent, and holy thought to be found throughout his writings.' The conduct and character of *Esmeralda* are 'too bad to dwell upon,' and the writer records that 'whenever his (Victor Hugo's) name is mentioned in England, his success is cited as a proof of the depraved state, moral and intellectual, of the French people.' She goes on, however, to point out

that, as a matter of fact, all persons of taste (that is all the fanatics of the classical school) in France agree in detesting Victor Hugo and all his works, and quotes a passage from his preface to 'Le Roi s'Amuse,' which she describes as one 'among many other symptoms of insanity.' 'Such productions as Victor Hugo's are calculated to do great injury to human nature,' we elsewhere learn. What Mrs. Trollope wrote, was the expression of an opinion which was then held by many people of authority in France and in England. What would be thought of a critic who committed himself to such a judgment now?

Victor Hugo was born on the 7th of the month Ventose, in the year Ten of the Republic, or in accustomed dates, on the 26th February 1802, at Besançon, where his father was in command of a demi-brigade. Among the military exploits of his father was the

taking of the celebrated brigand Fra Diavolo, whose real name was Michel Pazza, a man of extraordinary skill and courage, who was made a colonel and created Duke of Cassano by Ferdinand IV. The poet's uncle, General Louis Hugo, was also an officer of much distinction. The story of his experience at the battle of Eylau is preserved in the poet's biography, and its more picturesque incidents have been put into fiery verse in the lately-published series of 'La Légende des Siècles.'

The regiment was encamped by a ruined wall, with a belfry and tombstones hard by—

'Le soir on fit les feux, et le colonel vint
Il dit Hugo—Présent—Combien d'hommes? Cent vingt
Bien. Prenez avec vous la compagnie entière
Et faites-vous tuer. Où? Dans le cimetière.
Et je lui répondis, c'est en effet l'endroit.
J'avais ma gourde, il but, et je bus. Un vent froid
Soufflait. Il dit, la mort n'est pas loin. Capitaine,
J'aime la vie, et vivre est la chose certaine,
Mais rien ne sait mourir comme les bons vivants.'

Then follows a grand and terrible description

of the fight, and of how, from early morning till six at night, Hugo and his devoted company kept the cemetery—shot down one by one, until none were left but himself, the sergeant, and a drummer boy. The captain received a wound in the arm.

'Mon sergent me parla ; je dis au hasard—Oui !
Car je ne voulais pas tomber évanoui.
Soudain le feu cessa, la nuit sembla moins noire,
Et l'on criait Victoire et je criai Victoire.
J'aperçus des clartés qui s'approchaient de nous.
Sanglant, sur une main et sur les deux genoux
Je me trâinai. Je dis—Voyons où nous en sommes.
J'ajoutai—Debout tous !—et je comptai mes hommes.
Présent dit le sergent—présent dit le gamin.
Je vis mon colonel venir l'épée en main.
Par qui donc la bataille a-t-elle été gagnée ?
Par vous—dit-il. La neige était de sang baignée.
Il reprit,—C'est bien vous, Hugo ? c'est votre voix ?
Oui—Combien de vivants êtes-vous ici ?—Trois.'

The numbers have been by poetical licence slightly exaggerated. Instead of 120 men, out of whom three were left alive, there were really eighty, four of whom survived.

'Perhaps,' it is said in Victor Hugo's biography, 'one could not fully understand the militant character of Victor Hugo's literary and political life, if one did not know that all the members of his family, father and uncles, had been so devoted to song.' This militant character is sometimes strangely at odds with the poet's love of humanity and respect for human life.

In childhood the poet's military instincts and commanding genius came out in his being made king over one half of the Pension Cordier where he went to school. His brother Eugéne was king of the other half, and the power of those monarchs was so great, that when the masters had any trouble with a refractory pupil, they would beg King Victor or King Eugéne to command his subject to obedience.

While at school, the little Victor wrote quantities of verses, and at the age of fourteen

composed a tragedy, 'Irtamenes,' in which the royalist ideas which he got from his mother were rampant. At the age of fifteen he wrote a melodrama in three acts, called 'Inez de Castro,' which has been preserved in its entirety, and at the same date he resolved to compete for the Academy prize for poetry. His production was handed in in fear and trembling, and gained an honourable mention for the author, whose youth was a subject of astonishment to the Academicians. From this resulted a correspondence in verse between Victor Hugo and M. de Neufchâteau, the dean of the Academy, who himself had gained a provincial prize at thirteen years old.

One day Victor Hugo went to see M. de Neufchâteau, and found him busy with a new edition of 'Gil Blas.' A Jesuit named Isca had suggested that Lesage's novel was a mere copy of an old Spanish romance by Marcos Obregon de la Ronda. Neufchâteau, who did

not understand Spanish, was puzzled. 'I understand Spanish,' said Victor Hugo, and forthwith set to work on an elaborate comparison between the two works, which proved that they bore no resemblance to each other.

While Victor Hugo was at the college of Louis le Grand, there used to be meetings of a company of friends at a restaurant kept by a certain Edon.

One day at dinner some one said, 'We ought to write a book among us. Let us suppose that a group of officers, the evening before a battle, recount to each other their adventures. For each officer one of us shall write a story.'

The project was received with enthusiasm.

'How much time,' said Abel Hugo, 'are we to be allowed?'

'A fortnight,' replied Victor.

The others, astounded, said it was absurd and impossible, and the matter ended in Victor

laying a wager that he would have his story finished by the time he had named. When the fortnight was over, the friends assembled and Victor read to them 'Bug-Jargal.'

This for the work of a boy of sixteen is an astonishing performance. In it is to be found much of the descriptive power and of the force of imagination which were afterwards developed to a marvellous extent; and there is in it also the curious want of the logical faculty which is to be traced in the poet's later works.

The scene is laid in St. Domingo, during the rebellion of the blacks, so that the author drew upon his imagination for the fine descriptions of scenery which abound in the story. The chief characters are drawn with surprising power; but there is a gross absurdity in the incident which makes the teller of the story leave his newly married wife and go back to what seems a certain and horrible death, because of a promise fraudulently extracted from

him by one of the rebel chiefs. Nor is this the only absurdity; but such defects are very far outweighed by the extraordinary force of the book, when one remembers its author's age when he wrote it.

In the year 1820, Victor Hugo set to work at writing with new energy, having special reasons for wishing to make money. He gained a prize at the Academy of Toulouse, and his ode on Vendée was published in a review called the 'Conservateur Littéraire,' the notion of which originated with Abel Hugo.

At eighteen years old he produced that remarkable work 'Hans of Iceland.' Of this he himself writes:—

'Last May the want of expressing certain ideas that weighed me down, and that could not be expressed in our French verse, made me undertake a kind of romance in prose. My heart was full of love, of sorrow, and of youth. I dared not confide in any living creature. I

chose a mute confidant in the paper I wrote on. I knew that the work might bring me some money; but that was a secondary consideration in my undertaking it. I wanted to rid myself somehow of the troubles of my young and burning heart, the bitterness of my regrets, the vagueness of my hopes. I wished to depict a young girl who should realise all one can imagine of freshness and poetry—to give myself some sad consolation in drawing the image of her whom I had lost, and whom I could see only in the far future. I wished by the side of this girl to place a young man—not like me—but like what I wished to be. These two beings were the principals in a plot, half historical, half invented, which brought out a great moral lesson. Around the two chief characters I grouped many others, to vary the scene and set the wheels in action. These personages took rank in the story in different degrees of importance. The romance was to

be a long drama, with descriptions to supply the place of scenery and dresses. For the rest the characters were to reveal themselves in their speech; a notion which I got from the works of Walter Scott, and which I wished to try in the interest of our literature.'

It is noteworthy that Dumas's great drama of 'Henri III. et Sa Cour' was also in a measure founded upon Walter Scott, so that it may be said that the romantic school of poetry in France owed the origin of some of its finest works to the author of the Waverley Novels.

It is interesting to turn to a letter written by Victor Hugo a short time before the composition of 'Hans of Iceland,' and to see again in it with how different a spirit from that of Alfred de Musset he accepted the trials of life.

'There is no such thing,' he wrote, 'as despair, and a small check cannot beat down a high courage. I do not hide from myself the uncertainties or even the threats of the future;

but I learnt from my brave mother that fate can be mastered. Many are they who walk on firm ground with trembling steps. When one has a clear conscience and an honourable aim one should walk firmly on a soil that rocks and sinks.'

Yet, though he could write like this, and act up to the opinions thus expressed, he was by nature no less sensitive to the stings of care than the irritable race of poets, according to tradition, generally is. At about the same date, in another letter, he wrote :—'You cannot conceive how many worries beset me. Apart from all domestic troubles, I have to resign myself to all the revolting circumstances of literary hatred. I know not what demon has plunged me into a career where every step is barred by some masked enmity or base rivalry. It is miserable, and makes me ashamed for literature. It is wearisome to awake every morning to be the butt of petty

attacks—from a crowd of enemies whom one has never harmed, and the greater number of whom one has never seen. I would I could make you respect the great and noble profession of letters; but I am forced to admit that in it one makes a strange study of every kind of human baseness.'

This, however, was a frame of mind in which the poet rarely indulged himself. The result of his perseverance and greatness of mind was that his marriage took place far sooner than he seemed to hope—soon after the publication of his 'Odes and Ballads'—for which he got a sum greater than might have been expected, and which further brought him a pension from the King.

Time will not admit of going through anything like the whole of Victor Hugo's life or so much as touching upon many of his great works, one of which, 'Les Misérables,' it would take several hours to discuss at

anything like due length. And much of the poet's life must be untouched, even when all the political part of it is put aside, and only a passing mention is made of one of the objects, which he has never lost, a chance of aiming at. This object—the abolition of capital punishment — produced two well-known works from the author's pen—'Le dernier Jour d'un Condamné,' and 'Claude Gueux;' and produced also a variety of public addresses and appeals, one of which had a curious effect. It was designed to obtain a reprieve for a condemned convict in Guernsey; and, failing in that, it did some time afterwards obtain a reprieve for a condemned convict in Canada.

It may be noted that when Victor Hugo was only twenty years old, he was already a Chevalier of the Legion of Honour—a fact which once nearly got him into a scrape. He was on his way, in company with Charles

Nodier and M. Gué, to visit Lamartine in the country. He had left his passport behind, and was for the moment separated from the rest of his party. Two gendarmes pounced upon him, and asked by what right he wore the red ribbon in his button-hole. When he replied that it was the Legion of Honour, they informed him that that was not generally given to boys, and were on the point of arresting him, when Charles Nodier came up and said, 'This is the celebrated Victor Hugo.' Upon which the gendarmes, who had probably never heard the name, but did not wish to seem ignorant, made profound bows and excuses.

This visit to Lamartine was followed by a tour in Switzerland, the result of which was intended to be an illustrated book, to which the poet was to contribute a chapter. This chapter was the only one that was written, and its descriptive power is so great that it is a delight to read in it of places which one

thought other travellers had described to death.

A characteristic incident happened during this expedition. In those days the Mer de Glace at Chamouni, it would seem, was not without its dangers; and into one of these Victor Hugo was led by a young and inexperienced guide, who, however, exerted himself manfully to repair the mischief he had done, and lifted the poet off a thin ice bridge over a crevasse on to firm standing ground above. The guide was severely rebuked by the elder guide, who was with the rest of the party; and when he presented his book of recommendations to Victor Hugo, it was in much apprehension for the result. Victor Hugo wrote in it, 'Je recommande Michel Devouassous qui m'a sauvé la vie.' About the next important event after this journey was the meeting with Talma, which has been already described.

Any consideration, in a limited space, of Victor Hugo's works—to which but little detailed reference has been made—is, as has been said, impossible, because from the vast quantity of them, and the enormous number of passages which illustrate characteristically the poet's varying moods, it is not easy to make a selection. But to show his command of what is terrible, and of what is supremely tender, two passages from the first and second series of 'La Légende des Siècles' may be referred to.

Of the first—a description of Philip II. of Spain, which occurs in 'La Rose de L'Infante'—I have attempted a translation.

'Philip the Second was a thing of dread—
The Koran's Eblis and the Bible's Cain
Are scarce as black as was that spectre king,
Son of a spectre emperor—who sat
On the Escurial wielding evil's sword;
He hung above the nations like a dream—
He lived, and none dared look at him, for fright
Cast round the king a strange and baleful light.
Men shuddered as they saw his ushers pass,

So much was he confounded in their eyes
With the tomb's depths, and with the heaven's stars,
So near he seemed to be to God Himself.
His fatal will, that never could be moved,
Seemed to hold destiny with iron grasp.
All nations—save dark Britain—bowed to him;
His mouth was silence, mystery his soul;
His throne built up of fraud and treachery—
He rode the darkness like a sculptured knight.
Clothed in deep black, this shadow of the earth
Seemed ever to wear mourning for his life:
Like to the Sphinx that silent ruminates,
He being All, spoke Nothing.
No man had seen him smile; his iron lips
Could no more wear a smile than the bright dawn
Can penetrate the obscure gates of hell.
If ever he shook off his snake-like calm
It was to help the executioner:
And in his eyes what light reflected shone,
Came from the flames he cherished round the stake.
Thought—progress—life—and every human right
Dreaded this demon masquing as a god.
Whatever things his gloomy soul put forth
Glided like vipers hissing through the world.
The Escurial—Burgos—all his palaces
Kept the night's darkness on their livid walls.
No gaiety—no court—no jester's quips;
Treachery his sport—the stake his holiday;
While o'er the heads of all the other kings
His projects hung in dread obscurity;

His reveries weighed down the universe.
He would—and could—dissolve and conquer all.
His prayers were like the thunder; lightning flashed
In fury from the depths of his dark dreams.
Those whom he thought of gasped with stifling pain.
While far and wide throughout his realm's extent
Men trembled 'neath that grim gaze on them bent.'

The second is in a story which has been often, in one form or another, told before, but seldom with such force as here. Victor Hugo's later works especially contain many passages which show how true and tender is his understanding of the joys and sorrows of children; and one of the finest of these is 'Le Petit Paul,' which will be found in the latest series of 'La Légende des Siècles.' *Petit Paul* has no mother—he is brought up and idolised by his grandfather—the grandfather dies—Paul follows him to the tomb—the father marries again, and the boy is ill-treated and neglected by his step-mother. What follows on this readers had better discover for themselves.

In the poems which M. Hugo has but lately published, 'L'Art d'être Grandpère,' he gives a fresh proof that he has lost nothing of that vigour of imagination and expression, from which we may hope yet more addition to the immense quantity of beautiful things which he has in the course of a long life given to the world.

ROMANTICISM.

ROMANTICISM.

A MAN for whom every one who has made his acquaintance must, in spite of his absurdities, entertain a friendly feeling, M. Jérome Paturot, who owes his existence to M. Reybaud, has left on record his impressions of the first of the many phases through which he passed, that in which he was, or imagined himself to be, a *poète chevelu.*

M. Reybaud, following the example of many other distinguished writers, makes his story spring from a chance meeting with its supposed hero. He goes into Paturot's shop to buy a nightcap.

'I recommend you this kind,' says Paturot;

'it is the sort which M. Victor Hugo always wears.'

'Do you know M. Victor Hugo?' says the purchaser.

'Do I know him?' replies Paturot, with a sigh. Then, as if recollecting himself, he continues, 'I make for him.'

This incident leads by degrees to the recital of Paturot's various adventures.

'I was not always what you see me now,' he begins. 'My hair was not always of this decent length, nor was my general look so dully respectable. I have known what it is to possess the glory of passion-paled cheeks and of Merovingian locks. Yes, I led the applause at 'Hernani.' What a day that was! There were eight hundred young men there who would have torn in pieces M. de Crébillon fils, or La Harpe, or Lafosse, or any other defender of the Unities, who had dared to show themselves alive in the *foyer*. . . . . It was the moment

of the great literary crusade, of which you no doubt have heard, although by this time it is an old story. The youth of the day were filled with a kind of fever; the rebellion against the ancient school was rising to its height. Voltaire was demolished, Racine was done away with, Boileau was humiliated by being slightingly spoken of by his Christian name of Nicolas, Corneille was called an old pedant; in short, we applied the name of *polissons* to all our authors of the past. At the same time we announced that the day of true genius had dawned, that we had but to stamp on the ground to call up works full of brilliancy and colour, where the beauty of form should exhibit itself in millions of Eastern *arabesques*. The moment had come for the grand style, the true style, the supreme style—a style at once ornate, caressing, and flashing—a style which included the azure of the skies, the varying hues of the painter's palette, the

myriad fantasies of architecture, the warmth of love, the bitterness of jealousy, the calm smile of virtue, and the whole tempest of human passions. The literature which we were about to create was to be strident, chivalrous, blue, green, crimson; deep and calm as the lake, serpentine as the Malay's creese, keen as Toledo's blades. It was to concentrate in itself the haughtiness of the Spanish grandee and the reckless folly of Punchinello; it was to have the height of Stamboul's minarets, and the width of Venice's marble pavements. It was to bring together Soliman and Faliero, the muezzin and the gondolier. It was to sing with the bird, whiten with the wave, grow green with the leaf, ruminate with the ox, neigh with the horse; in short, it was to give itself, with extraordinary effect, to all physical phenomena, to conquer, to dominate, and, if I may use the expression, to "smash up" Nature.

That, neither more nor less, was our object. I say our, for in numerical order I was the hundred and ninety-eighth genius of the school. Scarcely was a chief proclaimed when I cried, "De ta suite j'en suis!" And so I was. By way of claim to admission, I composed a piece in monosyllabic verses, which was applauded to the echo, and which began thus :—

"Quoi !
Toi,
Belle,
Telle,
Que
Je
Rêve
Eve ;
Sœur,
Fleur,
Charme,
Arme,
Voix,
Choix,
Mousse,
Douce,"

and so on for a hundred and fifty lines.'

After a short and natural digression on the subject of sonnets, Paturot returns to the first representation of 'Hernani.' 'Then,' he says, 'we were in our glory. Never was a battle more unanimously, more vigorously conducted. You should have seen the effect of our hair; we looked like a troop of lions. And in what a way the piece was received! The benches of the Comédie Française kept the mark of it for at least three years. Considering our excitement, we ought to have been thanked for not pulling the house to pieces. All notions of right and propriety had vanished from our minds. It was I who in the first scene gave the signal for applause at the lines—

"Et reçoit tous les jours malgré les envieux,
Le jeune amant sans barbe à la barbe du vieux."

From this moment till the fall of the curtain there was one continued tumult. When *Charles the Fifth* exclaimed—

"Croyez-vous donc qu'on soit si bien dans cette armoire?"

the house was in a wondrous agitation. The scene of the pictures carried it off its legs, and the great monologue finished it up. 'If the play had been in six acts we should have all fallen down in fits. But the author was merciful, and we escaped with nothing worse than the cramp.'

It is not easy for a spectator at the performance of 'Hernani' in the present day to realise the immense din of battle which arose over the play when it was first produced nearly fifty years ago. It was a riot to which no parallel can be said to exist in English stage history—for the O.P. riots, which, perhaps, approached it in extent and form, were the result of a mere monetary question. 'Hernani' was the first occasion of the direct conflict between the partisans of romanticism and of classicism, which had long been threatening; and it may fairly be said, that by 'Hernani' the battle was won for the romanticists. The new school, which M. Reybaud so humorously describes, had been

gathering its strength for some time. It had for its head a man whose genius would have made him a leader of men whether he had been a poet, or, as he himself says he might very well have been, a soldier — M. Victor Hugo. Around him were assembled the forces of the *cénacle* of which he was the chief, and these again were supported by the *petit cénacle*, the van of which was led by Théophile Gautier and his red waistcoat. The members of this lesser circle looked up to the great master as they might have done to a divinity, and approached his threshold with trembling legs, which, when they were on the point of knocking at the door, carried them down stairs again in a spasm of reverence and awe. But their enthusiasm was not the less because it was dashed with a fearful devotion; and on the first night of 'Hernani,' on the 25th of February, in the year 1830, the pit of the Théâtre Français was filled with the

geniuses among whom Jérome Paturot ranked as the hundred and ninety-eighth. In the stalls and the balcony bristled the serried ranks of the opposite party. They had been disgusted enough, as has been seen, with the publication of M. Hugo's 'Cromwell,' and especially with its preface; but they felt that if the very temple of the drama was to be profaned with the representation of such a piece as 'Hernani,' they would do well to make immediate preparations for the end of the world. They felt as the Royal Academy might feel if told that their walls would henceforth be entirely filled by works of the impressionist school. And in the very first lines of the piece they found a point of attack. The play opens in the room of *Doña Sol*, the heroine. *Doña Josefa*, her attendant, is expecting *Hernani*, who secretly loves *Doña Sol*. She hears a knock at the door, and utters these lines:—

'Serait-ce déja lui? C'est bien à l'escalier
Dérobé—Vite—ouvrons—bon jour beau cavalier.'

In the placing of the substantive *escalier* at the end of one line, and its adjective, *dérobé*, at the beginning of the next, in this insolent straddling, as they called it, from verse to verse, the classicists found a marvellous deal of offence. 'A fit beginning for a literary debauch,' said one of them, 'to tear verse limb from limb, and throw the fragments out at the window.' He was answered by a partisan of the romantic school who was, perhaps, more zealous than wise, and who, after the manner of commentators, discovered far more in the lines than the author had ever put there. 'This seems to you a piece of carelessness,' he replied to the attack of the classic partisan. 'It is nothing of the kind. It is as thoughtful as it is beautiful.'

'"C'est bien à l'escalier—Dérobé." Do you not see how this word *dérobé* hung, as it were, outside the verse to which you would expect it to belong—do you not see how admirably this conveys the idea of the mysterious lover's stair-

case winding its erratic course outside the chamber wall? Why, what marvellous architectural science we have in this—what a comprehension of the art of the sixteenth century—what a deep inner consciousness of a dead civilisation!'

How long this enthusiastic disciple might have continued his commentary will never be known, for he was interrupted by cries of '*Hush.*' French people when they go to a theatre prefer the remarks of the actors to those of the audience.

'It is difficult,' wrote Théophile Gautier in 1872, 'now-a-days, when what then passed for barbarous romantic extravagance has become in its turn, after a fashion, classical, to describe the effect produced upon the audience by these strange lines, so powerful, so new, so curiously combining the qualities of Corneille and of Shakespeare;' and he goes on to call attention to certain lines which in 1830

were the never-failing signals for clamour and uproar. For instance, the words

'Est-il minuit? Minuit bientôt,'

were shocking to the ears of the anti-romanticists. It was something as horrible as new to them to see a king and a subject speaking to each other in verse on the boards of the Théâtre Français, without any of the turgid ornaments of diction which they held should be the invariable distinction of stage kings. They would have been satisfied if the reply had been, 'l'heure, atteindra bientôt sa dernière demeure,' or—

'Du haut de ma demeure
Seigneur l'horloge enfin sonne la douzième heure.'

If it was difficult in 1872 to realise to one's self the storm that raged over 'Hernani;' it is still more difficult now, when various lines which the management was afraid to pass on the revival of the piece in 1867 have been restored.

A comparison of some of these lines with those substituted for them in the first and second productions of the play may serve to indicate the kind of spirit which animated the opponents of the romantic school. The fourth act of the play passes in the vaults which contain the tomb of Charlemagne. These vaults have been chosen as a meeting-place by a band of conspirators, among whom is *Hernani*, who have resolved on killing *Charles the Fifth.* Charles, however, has become aware of their intentions, and just before they appear upon the scene conceals himself in the tomb of Charlemagne, to wait for the signal of his election as Emperor. It is at this point that he delivers the celebrated monologue, which begins—

'Charlemagne, pardon! ces vôutes solitaires
Ne devraient répéter que paroles austères;
Tu t'indignes sans doute à ce bourdonnement
Que nos ambitions font sur ton monument.
Charlemagne est ici! Comment, sépulcre sombre,
Peux-tu sans éclater contenir si grande ombre?

Es-tu bien là, géant d'un monde créateur,
Et t'y peux-tu coucher de toute ta hauteur ?
Ah ! c'est un beau spectacle à ravir la pensée,
Que l'Europe ainsi faite et comme il l'a laissée ! '

Until the present revival of the piece, the four lines—

' Charlemagne est ici ! Comment sépulcre sombre,
Peux-tu sans éclater contenir si grande ombre ?
Es-tu bien là, géant d'un monde créateur,
Et t'y peux-tu coucher de toute ta hauteur ? '

were omitted, apparently on the ground that the images contained in them were too extravagant to be endured. Again, at the end of this monologue—which is so magnificent that the twelve minutes occupied by its delivery seem like as many seconds—the King appeals to the shade of Charlemagne for help and guidance.

' Oh ! dis-moi ce qu'on peut faire après Charlemagne
Parle ! dût en parlant ton souffle souverain
Me briser sur front cette porte d'airain !
Ou plutôt laisse-moi seul dans ton sanctuaire
Entrer ; laisse-moi voir ta face mortuaire ;

Ne me repousse pas d'un souffle d'aquilons ;
Sur ton chevet de pierre accoude-toi. Parlons.
Oui, dusses-tu me dire, avec ta voix fatale
De ces choses qui font l'œil sombre et le front pâle,
Parle, et n'aveugle pas ton fils épouvanté,
Car ta tombe sans doute est pleine de clarté !
Ou si tu ne dis rien, laisse en ta paix profonde
Carlos étudier ta tête comme un monde ;
Laisse, qu'il te mesure à loisir, ô géant,
Car rien n'est ici-bas si grand que ton néant !
Que la cendre à defaut de l'ombre me conseille !
Entrons !—Dieu ! S'il allait me parler à l'oreille !
S'il était là, debout et marchant à pas lents !
Si j'allais ressortir avec des cheveux blancs !
—Entrons toujours.'

In the earlier representations of the play this speech was much mutilated by the omission of some of its best lines ; and for the fine phrase, 'Dieu ! s'il allait me parler à l'oreille !' was substituted the infinitely more tame and, according to the notions of that day, more safe and respectable, 'Dieu ! s'il allait me parler, s'il s'éveille !' 'Me parler à l'oreille !' was thought to be far too familiar and ordi-

nary, in other words, far too natural, an expression to be employed by a king who was speaking of the phantom of an emperor. Again, in the same scene, *Don Carlos* shocked at the petty selfish ambition of one of his followers, exclaims :—

> ' Basse cour où le roi, mendiè sans pudeur
> A tous ces affamés émiette la grandeur !'

On this subject, M. Victor Hugo, in his edition of 1873, has this characteristic note :— ' Ces deux vers furent supprimés par la censure qui n'était pas moins plate et moins inepte en dix huit cent trente qu'en dix huit cent trente six, et qui n'a jamais su échapper à l'odieux que par le ridicule. A la représentation on disait les deux vers que voici :—

> " Pour un titre ils vendraient leur âme en vérité.
> Vanité ! vanité ! tout n'est que vanité !"

Oui, *tout est vanité*, tout, jusqu'aux révolutions

prometteuses qui aboutissent en trois jours à la république et en trois ans à la censure.'

The alteration which was made here does not seem, when one considers the circumstances of the time, so utterly without reason as do some of the others, which at this day are hardly intelligible.

Gautier, as has been said, commented not many years ago upon the difficulty of making people at this time comprehend the extraordinary tumult which was raised in 1830 over a play which has now become a classical piece, just as much as the classical pieces which it aimed at upsetting in its youth.

Perhaps the easiest way of gaining some notion of the difference between the dramatic feeling of to-day and that of 1830 is to note this fact.

'Hernani' is a play in five long acts of verse. It ran for forty nights on the occasion of its first production. During these forty nights, at

one time or another, every single line in the piece was greeted with a hiss. One night the author and the players were talking together in the *foyer des artistes.* M. Victor Hugo observed that, to the best of his belief, every one engaged in the play had been hissed.

'No,' said one of the actresses; 'there is one whole part that has never been hissed. It is mine, and it consists of these words. *Don Garci* says to me,

"Marquise dansons-nous celle-ci?"

and I reply—

"Mon cher comte
Vous savez avec nous que mon mari les compte."

That is my part, and it has not been hissed yet.'

'It will be,' said M. Victor Hugo.

And so it was that very night.

Things are so different now, that not only

have almost all the lines which were supposed to be dangerous been restored and heard without any demonstration of enmity, but also M. Mounet-Sully, who now plays *Hernani* with much intensity and passion, wears his beard in direct contradiction to the line which describes *Hernani* as 'le jeune amant sans barbe.' If such a thing had been done in 1830, the classicists would probably have torn the house down.

Now that the first great outbreak of the romantic school in France has been in some sort described, it may be well to consider what romanticism really is or was. This is a question which it is not altogether easy to answer. Alfred de Musset—himself an ardent romanticist in the early days of the movement—threw ridicule upon both parties to the quarrel in some papers which he published in 1836, six years after the first representation of 'Hernani.' These papers were cast in

the form of letters to the editor of a well-known Paris review, from a certain M. Dupuis and his friend M. Cotonet, who were supposed to live in a small country town called La Ferté-sous-Jouarre. In the first of these letters M. Dupuis says:—'The art of writing is at a low ebb now, no doubt, but there was a time when books were read and when pieces were sometimes hissed. This was, if our memory serves us, from 1824 to 1829. You will remember that there was then much talk about a new style of writing in dramatic pieces, in novels, and even in sonnets. There was a good deal said about it here, but neither my friend Cotonet nor myself have ever been able to make out the meaning of the word romanticism, in spite of all that we have read about it, particularly in prefaces.

'The way in which the combat was set on foot among us was this. M. Ducoudray, the magistrate, gave a dinner in September 1824,

which turned out to be a very stormy meeting. Mme. Javart, who wears a wig, and imagined that no one knew it, had that day put on a headdress covered with nodding plumes. At her right hand sat the *receveur* of the town, who was a romanticist, and they soon began to discuss literature. Mme. Javart, who is a classicist, pronounced herself in favour of the Abbé Delille, whom the *receveur* called an old wig-block. By a deplorable fatality, at the moment when he pronounced this word in a loud tone, Mme. Javart's plumes caught fire at a candle. The other, seeing this, seized hold of them and tore them off: unfortunately the whole wig came off with them, and Mme. Javart was left bald. Not knowing that she had been on fire, she believed that he had torn off the wig by way of suiting the action to the word, and she retorted by throwing in his face an egg which she was about to eat. He was

furious, and Mme. Javart ran through the town with her wig in her hand till she reached her own house, where she fainted. That, sir, is how we became romanticists at La Ferté-sous-Jouarre.'

Dupuis goes on to describe how, excited by this incident, he and his friend Cotonet resolved to go deeply into the matter, and find out what really was the question over which so many clever men were disputing. For some time they were content to believe that the term romanticism was applied only to the theatre, and that the romantic school differed from the classical by its disregard of the unities.

'For instance,' he says, 'Shakespeare carries his spectators about from Rome to London, from Athens to Alexandria, in the space of a quarter of an hour: his heroes live several years in the interval between two acts. That, we said to ourselves, is romanticism. Sophocles, on the other hand, sets *Œdipus* down

on a rock at the beginning of his tragedy, and there all the other characters have to come and find him. That, we said to ourselves, is classicism. But suddenly—I think it was in 1828—we found out that there existed romantic poetry and classical poetry, romantic romances and classical romances, romantic odes and classical odes; in short, it seemed that even one solitary line taken by itself could be called romantic or classical, according to the mood of its readers.'

Fortunately, he goes on to say, while he and Cotonet were in this embarrassment, an illustrious preface appeared to enlighten and convince them. This was M. Victor Hugo's preface to 'Cromwell,' the object of which was to point out that the grotesque was a necessary element in modern poetry. This, it must be remembered, was hailed as a new discovery by the enthusiasts of the romantic school; and Dupuis and Cotonet were quite content for a

time to believe that the new school of romanticism had invented the alliance of comedy and tragedy, of the jocose and the serious.

But one morning Cotonet came into Dupuis's room with an Aristophanes under his arm, and proceeded to prove, by reading a few scenes that in the ancient theatre, which, according to M. Victor Hugo, saw only one side of human nature, taking no account of the other one, which it was reserved for Christianity to reveal and raise to its proper dramatic importance, that in this theatre there was certainly one poet who was by turns tragic and comic, terrible and tender, noble and grotesque. It was evident, then, that as novelty was the essence of romanticism, the definition which the two friends had lately arrived at would not hold good.

Then they passed through a variety of beliefs. In 1830, they imagined that romanticism meant the historical style; in 1833, that

it meant the wearing of long beards and flaring waistcoats; in the next year they were both too busy to have any belief at all; and finally, they resolved to discuss the matter with a lawyer's clerk, who, in 1824, had been the first to sow discontent in their souls by bringing news from Paris of the romantic movement The following dialogue took place between them :—

Dupuis—'Will you be so good as to explain to me the meaning of romanticism? Is it the contempt of the unities laid down by Aristotle, and respected by our French writers?'

The Clerk—'Undoubtedly. Who cares for Aristotle—a pedant, who has been dead two or three thousand years?'

Cotonet—'How can romanticism be a contempt of the unities when the word is applied to a thousand things besides dramatic pieces?'

The Clerk—'Very true. The unities are nothing—a mere trifle, not worth talking about.'

Dupuis—'Then I suppose it is the alliance of comedy and tragedy?'

The Clerk—'Exactly. The very thing. You have hit it off admirably.'

Cotonet—'My dear sir, Aristotle has certainly been dead for a long time; but also works in which tragedy and comedy are allied have been in existence for a very long time. For the rest this new Homer of yours, this Ossian, is serious enough in all conscience: there is not a laugh in him from beginning to end. Why, then, do you call him romantic? Homer was much more romantic than he is.'

The Clerk—'You are quite right. Pray excuse me; romanticism is something quite different.'

Dupuis—'Is it by chance the imitation of certain foreign writers; in a word, is it everything that is not Greek or Roman?'

The Clerk—'Not a doubt of it. We have got rid of the Greeks and Romans for ever. A lively and incisive verse—'

Cotonet—'Then romanticism is nothing but a plagiary, a reflection, a copy. It is shameful. France is no more English or German than she is Greek and Roman; and plagiary for plagiary, I would rather have a fine copy of the Hunting Diana than a monstrosity of worm-eaten wood found in a Gothic garret.'

The Clerk—'Romanticism is not a plagiary, and we wish to imitate no one. England and Germany have nothing to do with us.'

Cotonet—'What, then, is romanticism? Is it the avoidance of periphrases; is it the use of tremulous music for the entrance of a hero? There is nothing new in this.'

Finally the clerk, driven to desperation, exclaims:—'You ask what romanticism is? It is certainly not the contempt of the unities, nor the alliance of the tragic and comic, nor anything else in the world which you can describe. You might as well try to catch the bloom on a butterfly's wing. It is the tears of the stars,

the moaning of the wind, the voice of the night, the flight of the bird, the angel, the pearl, the foliage of the willow. It is the starry infinite, the sober, the violent, the fiery, the full, the round, the diametrical, the pyramidal, the oriental, the whirlwind—a whole new science! It is a providential philosophy, reducing all things to geometry, then launching itself into the vast sea of experience to follow up the secret fibres—'

'Sir! sir!' interrupts Cotonet, 'this is the most horrible nonsense. It makes me sweat to listen to you.'

'I am sorry,' replies the clerk; 'but I have told you my opinion, and nothing will make me change it.'

At last Dupuis does arrive at a certain conclusion, which he illustrates by taking a passage as it stands in 'Paul and Virginia,' and then translating it into the language of the romantic school. The original runs thus:—

'No care had marked their brows—no intemperance had corrupted their blood—no unhappy passion had depraved their hearts. Love, innocence, and piety developed every day with an ineffable grace the beauty of their souls in their features, in their attitudes, and their gestures.'

Romanticised it reads like this :—

'No precocious care had marked their innocent brows—no intemperance had corrupted their young blood—no unhappy passion had depraved their childlike hearts. Fresh flowers that had scarce opened their petals, candid love, blue-eyed innocence, and soft piety, developed every day with an ineffable grace the serene beauty of their souls in their gracious attitudes and their harmonious gestures.'

As may be judged from this, the conclusion at which Dupuis and Citonet finally arrive is that romanticism consists in the employment of a vast number of needless adjectives, and in nothing else.

Alfred de Musset, of course, did not mean this to be taken seriously, although there is a very considerable substratum of truth in it; and the end of the researches of Dupuis and Cotonet leaves us pretty much where we were at their beginning, without any tangible definition of what romanticism meant. The truth is that, as Musset hints in his satire, neither party could have given a definition of the principle for which it was fighting in the days of the great struggle between the classic and romantic school.

We have seen that the romanticists claimed Ossian as a bulwark of their pretensions; and we have seen the falseness of this claim in a technical sense exposed by the excellent Cotonet.

But the classicists went further than this. They actually put Byron forward as a chief of the school for which they were ready to fight to the last. If the combat had lasted long

enough, they might perhaps have arrived at enrolling Shakespeare and Goethe in the classical phalanx, while their opponents might have met and crushed these pretensions by triumphantly pointing to the wild, rugged, unbridled, and grotesque grandeur of Racine. It must have come to something approaching such a paradox as this, unless good sense, weariness, and such happy ridicule as Alfred de Musset's had intervened to put an end to the dispute, and prove to the partisans of each side that their zeal had carried them away into warring for phantoms.

Surely it is as absurd to contend that there should be no rules at all in poetry as to contend that it should be absolutely controlled by one or two narrow regulations. Each theory carried logically to its end lands us in what is ludicrous.

The upholders of the classical school were for preserving the unities at all costs. That

was the one important thing. But every classical play that ever was written broke through the unities as a matter of fact, because events which occupied two or three hours on the stage were to be supposed by the spectators to occupy twenty-four. What is this but romanticism? To be really consistent, the plays of the classical school should have represented on the stage speeches and occurrences exactly —to borrow a phrase from painting—life-size; a refinement of unity which was reserved for the comediettas and proverbs of the romantic school.

Again, in the plays of the romantic school which headed the van of the insurrection against classicism, all the characters expressed themselves in verse. What is this but classical?

If the great object, as the romanticists asserted, was to be true to nature, it was obviously a sin to allow every one to talk in

verse. Nay, more, it was absurd that every one should have a chance of saying something fine, whether in verse or prose, just when it suited the purpose of the author. In real life, it was ten to one that he would be interrupted before he had got out one-half of the brave words set down for him; and the measured diction of the hero was not a bit more like the speech of actual nature because it was not cast in what was called the classical mould. It would seem, too, on calm reflection, that the objections raised by the classicists—or, as their opponents sneeringly called them, the ancients—to the first so-called romantic play in verse which was launched at their heads, were not altogether unreasonable.

Putting aside all the frivolities of the unities, and the arrangement of substantives and adjectives, the fact remains that 'Hernani,' in spite of its immense power and beauty, is one

of the most inartistic plays ever written by a great author.

In order to appreciate to some extent the feelings of those followers of Delille who were shocked by its representation, it may be worth while to contrast its method with that of one of the plays of Racine.

The first scene of 'Hernani,' as has been said, is laid at Saragossa, in the apartments of *Doña Sol*, a noble Spanish lady, who is betrothed to her uncle, *Don Ruy Gomez de Silva*. Her attendant, *Doña Josefa*, expects every moment the arrival of *Hernani*, a mysterious person who is the chief of a crew of bandits. There is a knock at the door, and there enters, instead of the mysterious *Hernani*, an equally mysterious stranger who bribes the attendant to conceal him in a cupboard, from which he hears the dialogue between *Hernani* and *Doña Sol* in which she arranges to elope with him the following night. The mysterious stranger,

who is no other than *Charles the Fifth*, comes out of the cupboard, and is on the point of engaging in a duel with *Hernani*, when *Don Ruy Gomez* enters. To him the King reveals himself, and saves *Hernani's* life by describing him as one of his train. *Hernani's* father, it should be said, was executed, for what reason we are never told, by the King's father, and *Hernani* has vowed vengeance against the King.

In the second act, *Hernani* returns the compliment paid him by the King in the first. *Charles the Fifth* has laid violent hands on *Doña Sol*, and is on the point of carrying her off, when she is rescued by *Hernani*. The King, who now knows that *Hernani* is the celebrated bandit of whom he has determined to rid the country, refuses to cross swords with him, and *Hernani* magnanimously, on this occasion, refuses to kill an unresisting King.

In the third act, *Don Ruy Gomez* takes a hand in this curious game of life-sparing. The scene passes in *Ruy Gomez's* castle, where everything is prepared for his marriage with *Doña Sol*. *Hernani*, whose band has been broken up, and who is pursued by the King, comes in disguised as a pilgrim, and presently reveals himself in his true character. *Ruy Gomez*, however, regards his guest as sacred, and says that he is bound by the rites of hospitality to protect him even against the King himself. Even when he discovers *Doña Sol* in the arms of *Hernani*, he is still resolved to protect him. The King, who has tracked *Hernani*, enters. *Ruy Gomez* admits that he has concealed the bandit. 'His head or yours,' says the King. 'Take mine,' replies *Ruy Gomez*. It may be observed that all through the piece the personages seem literally to carry their lives in their hands, and to offer them to each other just as the characters in

old comedies offer each other snuff. The King departs, taking *Doña Sol* with him as a hostage. It is not until *Hernani* comes out from his hiding-place, and learns what has passed, that *Gomez* realises the danger of this. Then he is madly anxious to pursue the King at once; and upon this a most curious compact is entered into between him and *Hernani*. 'Let us put aside our enmity for the present,' says *Hernani*, 'in order to pursue and destroy our common rival. After that you can kill me at your leisure.' 'How can I be assured of this?' asks *Ruy Gomez*. Upon this *Hernani* takes off the horn which he wears at his side, and with which he is accustomed to summon his bandit crew, and offers it to *Ruy Gomez*. 'If it ever comes into your head,' he says, 'that I have lived long enough, you have only to let me hear a blast upon this horn, and all will be over.' Having arrived at this convenient arrangement, the two start off on the trail of the King.

The next act passes in front of Charlemagne's tomb. The men who have conspired to assassinate the King, among whom are *Ruy Gomez* and *Hernani*, draw lots for the privilege of striking the fatal blow. The lot falls to *Hernani*. *Ruy Gomez* offers to give up *Doña Sol* and the talismanic horn in exchange for the glory of murdering the King. *Hernani*, however, is so tenacious of this honour that even *Doña Sol* and the horn will not tempt him to give it up. Meanwhile the King, concealed in Charlemagne's tomb, has heard all; and at the signal of three guns, which tells him that he has been elected Emperor, he comes out. The conspirators are surrounded. *Hernani* announces himself to be Duke of Segovia and Cordova, Marquis of Monroy, Count of Albatera, Viscount of Gor, lord of more manors than he can count, John of Aragon, and Grand Master of Avis, and claims the privilege of wearing his hat in the

Emperor's presence. The Emperor, however, during his meditations in Charlemagne's tomb, has become merciful—he pardons all the conspirators, and bestows *Doña Sol's* hand upon *Hernani.*

The last act shows the wedding-feast of *Doña Sol* and *Hernani.* When the guests have departed, the sound of the fatal horn is heard, *Ruy Gomez* appears; he is deaf to the entreaties of *Doña Sol;* she and *Hernani* take poison and die in each other's arms, and *Ruy Gomez* kills himself.

The plot of the piece, it will be seen, consists in continually ringing the changes on the same situation. Every act ends with somebody sparing somebody else's life, except the last, when all the chief characters, except *Charles the Fifth,* die together. Again, the character of the hero is never fully explained. He gives us a long list of his titles, and tells us that his father was executed; but that is literally

all we know about him, beyond the fact of his being a brigand. All through the play we are led to expect that he will perform some mighty deed, but it never comes to anything. Then, when told in cold blood, the compact made between him and *Ruy Gomez* seems ludicrous. Again, the splendid monologue in front of Charlemagne's tomb has no real connection with the action of the play; and yet again, it is almost as difficult for a modern audience to sympathise with the notion of Castilian honour which runs through the piece, as with that of the vengeance of the gods which runs through Racine's 'Phédre.' As to the magnificence and dramatic force of the poetry of 'Hernani' there can be little doubt; but there can be equally little doubt that there was, after all, something to be said on the side of the classicists who so violently opposed it.

'Hernani' must indeed have been a great shock to an audience accustomed to the method

of Racine. They had always believed that tragic effect was to be obtained by the action of fatality, and not that of conflicting passions, upon the actions of mankind; that to give as life-like an impression as possible to the audience, the action of the play should pass in one place, and should occupy as nearly as possible the same time which the events represented would occupy in real life; and that to give a fitting dignity to the scene its actors should be kings and demi-gods. They found themselves hurried from place to place; asked to exalt a brigand into a hero; and to accept, in place of the awful destiny which shaped men's actions in the ancient tragedy, the effect of a rash promise made in a moment of passion. It was no wonder that they hated the romantic school, and they probably hated it not the less because they felt that the day for its triumph had come, after it had made many abortive attempts to assert itself.

That is, the time had come for a change in the monotonous conduct of the theatre—for romanticism really meant nothing more than the spirit of change. Literature and art of every kind had fallen into a languid state; it wanted new blood and there was plenty to be found; but there were many literary men who had grown so used to the old ways that they thought any change must be for the worse.

The supporters of the movement of 1829 traced its first origin in the works of Mme. de Staël, and found it carried on by Châteaubriand, Casimir Delavigne, and others; and later in M. Victor Hugo, after he had published 'Cromwell,' and various poems—before the production of 'Hernani'—they already recognised the 'true type of romanticism.' They gathered inspiration from the works of Shakespeare, Goethe, Schiller, and Walter Scott, and they succeeded in establishing the fact that it was

possible to produce a great play, poem, picture, or opera without following any cut-and-dried set of rules.

The influence of Goethe was very strong; but it is curious that in the early days of romanticism 'Faust' was considered a bad acting play, and 'William Tell' a very admirable one. Schiller's 'The Robbers' produced an enormous sensation—not greatly inferior to that of that remarkable book which gave one of the first impulses to the romantic movement, called 'The Sorrows of the Young Werter'—a book full of a beauty, which has been too much forgotten in the ridicule cast upon it in the pages of the 'Anti-Jacobin,' which with better reason attacked the follies of Kotzebue. And it may be noted that the existence of the kind of play which is now popular in France is due to Kotzebue as much as to Goethe.

The early romanticists were, naturally enough,

carried away into some extravagances by their enthusiasm, and some of them even went so far as to talk of romanticism in the science of medicine. As far as the fine arts were concerned, there certainly was crying need for a change; and one might have thought that it would have been more easy to introduce one on the stage, because for a very long time the excuse, a purely mechanical one, for the paucity of action and incident upon the boards of the theatre had disappeared.

This reason was a sufficiently ludicrous one —being nothing else than the custom which prevailed for a long time in France, as it did in England, among the young bloods of the day, of sitting on the stage. This was remarked by Voltaire; and Alfred de Musset called attention to Voltaire's remarks in an essay on tragedy, which he wrote in 1838.

'How is it,' he asked, 'that the tragedies of Racine, fine as they are, appear, as it must

be confessed they do, cold and formal, like stately statues half vivified? It is because in 1759 the Count de Lauraguais procured the removal of seats for the audience from the stage at a cost of thirty thousand francs. Now-a-days Andromache and Monimia stand alone in their vast peristyles, and have an area of sixty feet to walk about in. There are no more marquises to surround the actress and crack a joke with her after every tirade, to pick up Hermione's fan, and criticise Theseus's stockings. Orestes is no longer obliged to turn to a group of dandies and say, 'Pray, gentlemen, let me pass. I have to go off to kill Pyrrhus.'

'That is why we have found out the languor of these tragedies, and feel surprised that no one takes advantage of the open doors of the palace to come in and give some touch of liveliness to the piece.'

Alfred de Musset wrote this essay when

he was filled with enthusiasm for the genius of Rachel; and to that is probably due the extreme ardour with which he subsequently takes up the cause of the classical school—that very school which in his early days he himself grievously outraged with his 'Ballad to the Moon.' He comments upon the strong and rapid effect produced by the literary revolution of 1830, and goes on to speak of the authors who attempted to steer between Scylla and Charybdis, by adopting a kind of middle style—half tragedy, half melodrama—who eluded rather than broke the ancient rules. La Motte, he observes (who by-the-bye was the first French writer who started the idea of tragedies written in prose without regard to the unities—an idea which Voltaire called the abomination of desolation), said that the unities were a mere plaything.

'Certainly,' wrote Musset, 'no writer is

obliged to follow them. The rules of tragedy only concern those who wish to write tragedy. A poet may write something quite different, and, if he likes, he may call it a tragedy; but he can hardly make us believe that it is one, unless he imitates the priest who, before eating a chicken during a fast, threw water upon it and said, "I baptise you with the name of carp." If,' continues Musset, 'the rules were things desired merely to narrow the scope of poets, and worry them with vain puerilities, it is hardly likely that such men as Sophocles, Euripides, and Corneille would have submitted to them. The rules are really the result of a long consideration of the best means of attaining the highest result of art. So far from being obstacles, they are so many secret weapons or levers.

Let us suppose that the middle style has become established in France, and that two writers, one a man of independent genius like

Shakespeare, the other a man of a cultivated taste like Racine, come to the front, what will happen? The independent writer will find that he is cabined, cribbed, confined by what remains of the spirit of the ancient rules, while the other, if he is ignorant of the rules, will soon find them out for himself; he will see that the more he gets rid of striking scenes and episodes, the more grand and simple will be his work.'

Musset goes on to assert roundly that it is time for the young writers of the day to make a counter-movement, and apply to modern thought the stately simplicity and, if one may use such a phrase, the narrow grandeur of the ancient stage. Here we may venture to think that he is wrong—the more so because he can be convicted out of his own mouth. In another passage of his writings, which seems to me to be much more to the purpose, he says that the real reason of many literary follies of the

day is the inability or refusal of writers to enter into the spirit of the day. All imitation of the past, he says, is absurd. Formerly, remarkable deeds were distinguished by remarkable surroundings—now all that is changed. He illustrates his meaning by an example.

A man who having led an honourable life finds himself crushed by misfortune, and wishes to kill himself. Suppose such a man to be a banker, and suppose that you read in an evening paper that he has killed himself after the manner of Marcus Otho, who ran upon his sword, and told his servant to go and show himself to the guards lest he should be punished as an accessory—these circumstances applied to a modern banker will appear far out of place. What the modern man will do will be to make his preparations quietly, and contrive that his death shall appear the result of an accident—a fall in the Alps, for example. 'Voilà,' says

Musset, 'une vraie mort de notre temps; mais pensez combien elle est simple!'

Without discussing how far Musset was right in taking simplicity as the keynote of modern life, it may be conceded that he was right in what he said of the influence which the spirit of the time should have upon writers. And this, it seems to me, has at least as much to do with the formal grandeur of ancient tragedy as the researches after the utmost expression of the beautiful, which in the other passage Musset supposes the ancient tragic writers to have made before they adopted the rules which governed them. What Musset meant when he expressed himself so strongly in favour of the ancient method, and against what he called the middle style, was shown by his own most successful dramas—and in his own way he was second to none as a dramatist. These were all cast in what might fairly be called a middle style. He did not regard the unities as

inviolable, and yet one of his finest pieces, 'Les Caprices de Marianne,' is so arranged that it is quite easy to play it with the strictest regard to the unities. And until a short time ago, it always was so played at the Théâtre Français. He got rid, of course, of the expressed idea of destiny which dominated the Greek tragedy, but without substituting for it any such device as the Castilian honour of 'Hernani,' without making special reference of any kind to what was in his mind, he contrived to impress upon his readers or spectators the notion of an implacable fate, waiting silently and surely to enwrap in its fatal embrace at the destined moment the men and women who till then laughed and wept and exchanged jests or protestations, unconscious of the horror that waited to overwhelm them.

This is most strongly felt in 'Les Caprices de Marianne,' in which the final Nemesis is

as complete and almost as personal as it is in the Greek tragedies.

Musset, however, stands alone in the penetrating and fiery beauty of his short pieces, as M. Victor Hugo does in the stormy and majestic grandeur of his longer plays. It can hardly be asserted that either M. Dumas, M. Feuillet, M. Sardou, M. Coppée, or even M. Augier, can pass as rivals to Racine. It would seem, when one looks at the monotonous character of the dramas which have of late years been successful in France—all turning more or less upon conjugal infidelity—that the time had come for a new romantic school to arise. But as yet the only signs of such a thing have been seen in the mad vagaries of the impressionist school of painters, and the mud-fireworks of such writers as M. Zola in literature. It is not by throwing off all rules to break into spasms of eccentricity, or to clear every barrier which decency has set up, that a painter or

a writer can really prove himself the prophet of a new phase in art.

We in England have not been without our struggles between the classic and the romantic school. But they arose in a different way; and it is not, it is to be feared, very much to our credit that, whereas the outbreak of romanticism in France was due to a long submission to arbitrary and pedantic regulations, we turned out of the right path to follow the wrong one. How far exactly the trick was caught from France, it would be difficult to say; but it is certain that in the eighteenth century the literary authorities of England deliberately rejected the very school in which, in the nineteenth century, the rising lights of French literature found their starting and resting points. We suddenly became as submissive to the dogmas of Aristotle as Richelieu himself can have been. It was not the first time that the classical rules had been upheld by an English poet.

Sir Philip Sidney, writing in the sixteenth century of the tragedy of 'Gorboduc,' which was produced in 1561, some twenty years before he wrote, commented with severity upon the disregard of the classical rules which it exhibited. 'But besides these gross absurdities,' he added, 'how all their plays be neither right tragedies nor right comedies; mingling kings and clowns, not because the matter so carrieth it, but thrust in the clown by head and shoulders to play a part in majestical matters with neither decency nor discretion, so as neither the admiration and commiseration, nor right sportfulness is by their mongrel tragi-comedy obtained.'

It is probable that the extreme licence of literature, both on and off the stage, in the time of the Restoration had a good deal to do with the return to Sir Philip Sidney's opinion in the eighteenth century. 'It was no longer,' wrote Schlegel of the Restoration

drama, 'an English national, but a London comedy. Almost all of it turns on fashionable love-suits and fashionable raillery; the love affairs are either disgusting or insipid, and the raillery is always puerile and devoid of humour.' (This dictum of Schlegel's, by the way, can hardly be admitted; the want of wit must have lain rather with him than with the dramatists.) 'These comic writers,' he continues, 'may have accurately hit the tone of their time; in this they did their duty' (this, it may be observed, is precisely what Alfred de Musset says); 'but they have left a lamentable memorial of their age. Beaumont and Fletcher,' he continues, 'portrayed a vigorous, though irregular, nature; but nothing can be more repulsive than rude depravity coupled with claims to higher refinement.' This is all true enough, but the reaction which followed might have satisfied even the Abbé Delille himself. Aristotle in the eighteenth century

became everything, while Shakespeare—what was thought of Shakespeare can be best shown by a passage from Hume, which is tolerably well-known, but which is so curious that it will bear repetition.

'If Shakespeare be considered as a man born in a rude age, and educated in the lowest manner, without any instruction from books *or from the world*, he may be regarded as a prodigy. If represented as a poet capable of furnishing a proper entertainment to a refined or intellectual audience, we must abate much of this eulogy. A striking peculiarity of sentiment adapted to a single character he frequently hits, as it were, by inspiration, but a reasonable propriety of thought he cannot for any time uphold. Nervous and picturesque expressions, as well as descriptions, abound in him, but it is in vain we look for purity or simplicity of diction.'

Again, Goldsmith, in the 'Vicar of Wake-

field,' puts into the mouth of Dr. Primrose these remarkable words. The strolling player whom he meets informs him that 'Dryden's and Rowe's manner are quite out of fashion; our taste has gone back a whole century. Fletcher, Ben Jonson, and all the plays of Shakespeare are the only ones that go down.' 'How,' cried I, 'is it possible the present age can be pleased with that antiquated dialect, that obsolete humour, those overcharged characters which abound in the works you mention?' And again, in another well-known passage of the same book, he classes 'Shakespeare, taste, and the musical glasses' together as parallel types of an absurd prejudice. The 'purity and simplicity of diction,' which was dear to what may be called—not the classical, but the classicist period of English literature—was found in such lines as those uttered by Carlos in Young's 'Revenge':—

'But now my sorrows long with pain supprest,
Burst their confinement with impetuous sway,
O'erswell all bounds, and tear e'en life away:
So till the day was won the Greek renowned
With anguish bore the arrow in his wound,
Then drew the shaft from out his tortured side,
Let flow the torrent of his blood and died.'

In those days the most tragical incidents were regarded merely as capital upon which to build similies; and there is really very little burlesque in the lines put into the mouth of *Lord Grizzle* in 'Tom Thumb,' with the view of ridiculing this classicist fashion.

'Tom Thumb shall feel the vengeance he has raised.
So (it was always "so"), when two dogs are fighting
in the streets,
With a third dog one of these dogs meets,
With angry tooth he bites him to the bone,
And this dog smarts for what that dog has done.'

Nicholas Rowe, who was one of the most successful, and one of the most pernicious, dramatists of the English classicist period, was actually condescending enough upon one occa-

sion to recognise the fact that Shakespeare had some merits. He wrote a piece called 'Jane Shore,' which was called on its title-page 'A Tragedy, written in imitation of Shakespeare's style.' The prologue to this admirable production conveyed the author's intention:

'To-night, if you have brought your good old taste,
We'll treat you with a downright English feast.'

He goes on to speak of the writers who, before his time, have ventured to meddle with the subject of 'Jane Shore,' and modestly says:

'Our numbers may be more refined than those:
But what we've gained in verse we've lost in prose.
Their words no shuffling double meaning knew;
Their speech was homely, but their hearts were true.
In such an age immortal Shakespeare wrote,
By no quaint rules nor hampering critics taught:
With rough majestic force he moved the heart,
And strength and nature made amends for art.
Our humble author does his steps pursue,
He owns he had the mighty bard in view.
And in these scenes has made it more his care
To rouse the passions than to charm the ear.'

Yet he goes on to hint he has not been unmindful of this latter duty; and, in fact, gives one to understand that his method includes and improves upon that of Shakespeare. How far he justified these hints may be guessed from a few lines in this play, which professed to be 'written in imitation of Shakespeare's style.' These lines are spoken by Lord Guildford, who says:—

> 'I have a thought—but wherefore said I one?—
> I have a thousand thoughts all up in arms,
> Like populous towns disturbed at dead of night,
> That, raised in darkness, bustle to and fro,
> As if their business were to make confusion.'

If to be Shakespearian is to caricature Shakespeare's sometimes confused metaphor, this passage is certainly more Shakespearian than anything which Shakespeare himself ever wrote. But to appreciate the full depth of platitude and inanity of the classicist school in England, it would be necessary to call detailed

attention to such works as Jones's 'Earl of Essex,' Brown's 'Barbarossa,' and Glover's 'Boadicea;' and to do that would be hardly kind to the departed.

The reaction against this was due in a great measure to a poet whose share in putting an end to it is perhaps too much forgotten—Wordsworth, whose fine protest against the classical formalities, and defence of Shakespeare was published in 1815. It has been said that the French classicists claimed Byron for their own —probably on account of his admiration for Pope and his contempt for Wordsworth. But it was Wordsworth who made Byron possible.

There is this curious point of similarity between the literary history, in this respect, of France and England—that in the case of each the movement of innovation and improvement was not actually started, but was made to take a tangible shape by actors. The influence of Garrick in this respect in England corre-

sponds more or less to that of Le Kain and of Talma in France. Garrick upset the measured chant which was supposed till his arrival to be inseparable from tragic speeches. He introduced the then extraordinary theory that it was better to indicate natural effects than to imitate a model which, in the first instance, had aimed at being better and greater than nature, and had ended by being a mere convention.

Garrick, however, did not venture, as did Le Kain to some extent, and Talma to a greater extent, to break down the conventions of stage costume. Whether he played *Macbeth* or *Hamlet*, Garrick appeared in the dress proper to the time in which he lived—not to that of the personage whom he represented. Talma to the end of his life complained of never having had a really natural part to act, but congratulated himself on having made up for this more or less in the naturalness of his costumes.

This was not the limit of Talma's attempts after what was natural. The great Napoleon gave him various hints upon this matter, and he was not slow to adopt them; but the fact remained that, in his own words, he asked for Shakespeare and they gave him Ducis. Garrick, on the other hand, had Shakespeare ready to his hand, and thought it necessary to improve upon him.

It was reserved for the Kembles and for Edmund Kean to venture upon a natural costume, as it was reserved for Macready to interpret that special form of the so-called romantic drama which was to a great extent the watchword of the romanticists in France. It was from Walter Scott that M. Victor Hugo and Dumas drew some of their happiest inspirations; and it was Macready who not only chiefly made the heroes of Walter Scott familiar to the playing public of England, but also helped to inspire the young playwrights of Paris to attempt

a form of drama which should be, as Talma said, at once tragical and natural.

But the evil influence of the classicist tradition was so strong, that it was not until quite recent years that Shakespeare, unadorned by Tates and Cibbers, could be presented to the public; and it is possible that a good many people were disappointed at not hearing the familiar line, 'a weak invention of the enemy,' when Mr. Irving appeared as *Richard III.*

Poor Cibber, however, was very far from being the worst sinner against Shakespeare. Otway, for whom Goldsmith seems to have had an ardent admiration, produced a tragedy called 'Caius Marius,' half of which he acknowledged, with a touching frankness, that he had 'rifled' from 'Romeo and Juliet.' Had he confined his exertions to mere rifling, the result would have been less appalling than it is. *Romeo* and *Juliet* become *Marius* and

Lavinia, and *Marius* enters *Lavinia's* garden with these words :—

'He laughs at wounds that never felt their smart;
What light is that which breaks through yonder shade?'

Lavinia presently exclaims to him :—

'Deny thy family, renounce thy name,
Or if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,
And I'll no longer call Metellus parent.'

For the conclusion of *Juliet's* speech, before she drinks the sleeping draught, Otway substituted these ingenious lines :—

'What! Sylla? Get thee gone, thou meagre lover,
My sense abhors thee—don't disturb my draught,
'Tis to my lord.'

Yet so lately as 1813 a writer, who edited Otway's works, gravely observed that in this play 'the diction of Shakespeare has been polished and improved without losing the spirit of his meaning.'

The Duke of Buckingham applied the same

polishing and improving process to *Julius Cæsar*, and altered the first line of *Antony's* speech to this :—

'Friends, countrymen, and Romans, hear me gently.'

But perhaps the most ludicrous of all these attempts was Dryden's version of 'The Tempest.' 'Sir William Davenant,' says Dryden, in his preface to this strange piece of work, 'as he was a man of a quick and piercing imagination, soon found that somewhat might be added to the design of Shakespeare, of which neither Fletcher nor Suckling had ever thought. He put the last hand to it : he designed the counterpart to Shakespeare's plot—namely, that of a man who had never seen a woman, that by this means those two characters of innocence and love might the more illustrate and commend each other. This excellent contrivance he was pleased to communicate to me, and desire my assistance in it. I confess that from the very first

moment it so pleased me, that I never writ anything with more delight.'

The days of such follies as these are happily passed away; but, taking romanticism to mean something which varies a monotonous style, it may well be thought that some infusion of romanticism at this time would not be bad for us. We have the authority of Lord Beaconsfield for believing that we are the most imaginative nation in the world; but, as far as our dramatic literature now-a-days is concerned, our imagination is chiefly exercised in assigning hitherto unknown meanings to French phrases. Some dramatic writers of original power we undoubtedly possess, but we can hardly boast of anything like a school. On the other hand, in painting—of which Lord Beaconsfield was speaking when he commented on our imaginativeness—we have romanticism enough, and to spare. And, like the romanticism of the French, it consists—just as much as

classicism does—in returning to models which were thought to have been superseded long ago. In fact, the study of the history of romanticism would seem to confirm the truth of the old saying that there is nothing new under the sun.

COLSTON AND SON, PRINTERS, EDINBURGH.

00023341

Digitized with financial assistance from the
Government of Maharashtra
on 18 July, 2018